

Brill's Companion to Seneca

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Brill's Companion to Seneca

Philosopher and Dramatist

Edited by

Gregor Damschen
Andreas Heil

With the assistance of

Mario Waida



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PREFACE

There are already quite a few introductions to Seneca on the market; yet still lacking is a well-ordered, concise presentation which places the philosophical works and the tragedies on an equal footing and deals with them accordingly. The principal aim of "Brill's Companion to Seneca" is to fill this gap. The subtitle "Philosopher and Dramatist" indicates and emphasizes the express intention of taking seriously both Seneca the philosopher and Seneca the poet and playwright. Therefore, the philosophical works are examined first and foremost in the light of philosophy, and this entails employing all the systematic methods which are at the disposal of specialists in philosophy. By analogy, the tragedies of Seneca are not viewed merely as valuable comparative sources for Seneca's philosophy but recognised as valid forms of expression in their own right.

The second aim is to create a valuable standard work for the purposes of international Seneca research. To this end the volume contains a comprehensive survey of each genuine, doubtful and wrongly attributed work of Seneca ("Works"). In the style of concise handbook articles each individual work is dated and briefly described with regard to content; included is a discussion of the most important philological and philosophical issues as well as an account of the reception history. In addition, the volume offers fuller presentations of the most important problem areas within the philosophic and tragic corpus of Seneca ("Topics"). It also contains a historical section in which Seneca's life and posthumous influence is dealt with ("Life and Legacy") as well as two studies in which the contemporary preconditions for the philosophical works and the tragedies are presented with due reference to the history of philosophy and the history of culture ("Context").

The quality of a handbook or collective work is of course dependent on the quality of the contributions. Therefore, our foremost debt of gratitude is to the authors who breathed life into the scheme. We are especially grateful to our teacher, Michael von Albrecht, who not only contributed, but encouraged us in the first place to take up this vast project. Aldo Setaioli was of great help to us in a time of crisis providing some of his contributions at short notice. We owe a lot to Andrea Balbo and Ermanno Malaspina for compiling the comprehensive bibliography. The Dresden University of Technology and the University of Lucerne provided valuable resources. Last but not least, we would like to thank the staff at Brill Publishers, particularly Michiel

Klein-Swormink, Irene van Rossum and Caroline van Erp, for their careful guidance as well as for their never ending patience.

Finally, we have to ask pardon for the delay in publication. The contributors are not to be blamed in any case. Although some of the circumstances responsible were beyond our control, we, the editors, take full responsibility.

The editors,
Dresden and Lucerne, Spring 2013.

PART ONE

LIFE AND LEGACY

IMAGO SUAE VITAE: SENECA'S LIFE AND CAREER

Thomas Habinek

INTRODUCTION

Something about Seneca prompts general studies. I wrote these words in 1985,¹ and they remain true to this day. Biographies or “holistic” approaches to Seneca continue to appear on a regular basis and to outnumber such treatments of other Greek and Roman writers.² The reason is not far to seek: the slipperiness of this figure, his complexity, versatility, and contrariety all challenge much-cherished ideals of stable, autonomous selfhood that lie at the heart of modern bourgeois civilization. Scholars seek to turn the fragmentary biographical details and the massive literary output of Seneca into a comprehensible life precisely because they resist such easy formulation. Indeed, Seneca is among the most aggressive proponents of the idea that the self is a social being, unlimited by the boundaries of an individual body or mind. To write a biography of Seneca is thus to risk doing violence to the historically contingent experience attested by the literary texts and historical fragments that cluster around the name “Seneca.”

And yet, paradoxically, some sort of biographical framework is necessary if we are to begin to comprehend the ideas of self and society to which Seneca's career, reputation, and writings provide access. Such a framework is best imposed not from the outside (i.e., modern ideas of the shape and structure of a life, modern conceptions of selfhood or subjectivity), but from the inside, by drawing on ancient, Stoic, and more specifically Senecan notions of the structuring principles of the world and its subcomponents.

¹ Habinek 1985: 103.

² E.g., Griffin 1976, a characteristically British empiricist attempt to separate fact from fiction; Sørensen 1984, emphasizing Seneca's humanism; Rozelaar 1976, which applies psycho-analytical categories to Seneca's behavior; Maurach 1991 (1996), who differentiates his work from earlier biographies on the grounds that he considers the treatises of Seneca as well as the life; and Veyne 2003, which considers Seneca's life through the lens of his Stoicism. Also relevant is Volk and Williams 2006, which purports to “see Seneca whole” by discussing him in parts.

Two terms are crucial to such an endeavor and provide points of reference for this essay, namely *ratio* and *societas*.³ Senecan thought and Stoic philosophy, more generally, employ these terms to describe the conditions and highest aspirations of human existence. The dialogical tension between the terms and between the concepts they convey encapsulates a dynamic worldview that pays equal respect to humanity's desire for order and control and its experience of chaos and dependence. *Ratio*, which translates and amplifies the Greek term *logos*, is best understood as 'account' or 'accounting'. *Ratio* for the Stoics is the human apprehension of *natura*, or the order of the universe. (In this respect it resembles, and perhaps inspires, the evangelist John's representation of Jesus as *logos*, or human understanding, of a God who personifies the principle of being.) *Ratio*, as a Latin term, implies the ability to count, analyze, describe, summarize, and otherwise render comprehensible and communicable to others the particulars of any aspect of experience.⁴ We capture the flavor of the term when we speak, for example, of "rationalizing" a law code, or providing an "account" of our behavior. While a modern notion of reason might allow for explanations that are symbolic, mathematical, or visual in form, *ratio*, especially when used as a Latin translation of Greek *logos*, inclines toward the verbal and narrational. Thus, to gather the pieces of evidence for Seneca's birth, death, and intervening activities, to evaluate their reliability, and to organize them into some sort of narrative is to engage in activities appropriate to a historically based understanding of the term *ratio* and thus, I would argue, to a historically legitimate representation of Seneca's life.

Such an accounting, however, is only one part of the story, or only one version of the life of Seneca. For Seneca and the Stoics, humans are both rational and social beings. Their exercise of reason and their sociability

³ Uses of the terms are too numerous to recount here. Representative passages include Sen. *epist.* 79.9 f., in which *ratio* is presented as the best and defining characteristic of human beings; Sen. *epist.* 121.3 f., where we are taught that humans and gods, as opposed to animals and plants, have reason; Sen. *clem.* 3.1.2, where Stoics are said to believe that "man is a social animal born for the common good" (*hominem sociale animal communi bono genitum*); Sen. *benef.* 4.18.1, where we are taught that *ratio* and *societas* are the god-given characteristics of human beings; Sen. *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).15.2, *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).31.7, *clem.* 1.12.3, 1.14.3, where the relationship between humans and society is likened to that between organs and body. In the light of the latter group of passages (on social interactions) it is hard to understand Veyne's assertion that Seneca and the Stoics "did not perceive anything called *society* intervening between natural law and the individual" (Veyne 2003: 141). Seneca's emphasis on *societas* is a manifestation of his Romanness as well as of his commitment to Stoic teachings. On *societas* and *communitas* in Roman law and thought, see Daube 1938.

⁴ See, in particular, Moatti 1997.

toward one another differentiate them from other species and mark them for a higher and more god-like destiny.⁵ Even animals that we might regard as social in nature are understood by the Stoics to be lacking in the modes of communication and intersubjective representation that ground human experience and implicate the self in social interactions.⁶ As Seneca puts it in his essay *On Benefits*, "God has given mankind two characteristics that transform it from vulnerable to supremely strong, namely reason and sociability [...] it is sociability that grants mankind dominion over all other creatures" (*duas deus res dedit, quae illum obnoxium validissimum facerent, rationem et societatem [...] societas illi dominium omnium animalium dedit: benef. 4.18.1*).

The context of the quotation makes clear that Seneca is speaking not just about the relative power of human beings over other species, but also about the merit and value of human social existence. To understand a human being, at least from the perspective of a Roman Stoic like Seneca, one must situate him or her in a social context. The point may seem obvious, but in fact it flies in the face of most modern philosophical and scientific systems that take for granted an isolated "I," who chooses the extent to which he or she will involve himself or herself in an external world. For the Stoics, as for a new generation of neuroscientists, the self is to be understood as a node in the network of intersubjective relations.⁷ Without others, there is no human self. The very characteristics that make us human (language, thought, ritual, etc.) are all social constructs. Roman Stoics, building on what seem to be folk understandings of the self, press this insight further, drawing the implication

⁵ On human sociability, human difference from animals, and human association with gods, see Cic. *fin.* 3.62–68 (= Long and Sedley 57F). Especially striking is the reference there to Chrysippus's claim that "everything else was created for the sake of men and gods, but these for the sake of community (*communitas*) and society (*societas*)."⁷ Origen *princ.* 3.1.2 f. (= Long and Sedley 53A) explains that while humans share sensation and impulse with animals, animals lack reason.

⁶ Sen. *epist.* 121.6–15 (= Long and Sedley 57A); S. Emp. *adv. math.* 8.275 f. (= Long and Sedley 53T).

⁷ For a biologically based understanding of the inevitability of human intersubjectivity and sociability, see, for example, Donald 2001. For the early (i.e., pre-Senecan) Stoic view, see Reesor 1989, esp. p. 8, where she summarizes Stoic thought thus: "It is inconceivable, therefore, that a man's individuality can be realized in any other society, with any other group of individuals, or in any other period than that in which he is actually living." The grounding of the self in society has received less attention by recent commentators than it should due to a (misplaced, in my view) eagerness to understand the Stoic self as predecessor of the modern autonomous self rather than to situate it in the broader system of Stoic thought (including physics) and the historical context of its production.

that the boundaries of the self can expand and contract over a lifetime and that at any given moment some selves may be bigger than others, indeed may encompass others, such as family, dependents, and slaves.⁸

If, then, we are to comprehend Seneca's life in terms that are appropriate to his era, we must understand it as a node in the network of social exchange. It is only through encounters and interactions with other human beings and participation in the broader social institutions that structure those interactions—such as a changing political culture; economic expansion; reliance on slaves; systems of patronage, friendship, and dependence; patterns of love and desire; and so forth—that a life of Seneca begins to take shape. Or, to put it in a more positive vein, the dearth of reliable, unambiguous evidence pertaining to the activities and intentions of one Lucius Annaeus Seneca does not prevent and may even facilitate the recovery and representation of “his” “life”.

BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

Seneca was born in Córdoba, capital of the Roman province of Baetica in the south of Spain, probably between 4 and 1 BC. The locale is attested by references in the writings of his father and his younger contemporary Martial,⁹ while the date is a plausible inference from his own allusions to childhood experiences¹⁰ and from Nero's reference to the prematurity of his request to retire in AD 62, at least as reported by Tacitus.¹¹ Seneca's father, whose surviving treatises on the history and practice of declamation provide strategically placed details of family background and connections, was of equestrian rank, and although of Spanish birth, seems to have spent a good

⁸ Linguistic and legal assumptions make the slave part of its master's person: Reay 2003 and 2005.

⁹ Sen. *suas.* 2.18 refers to Statorius Victor, whom other sources identify as Córdoba (see *RE* 2.3.2230–2232), as *municipe meus* ('my fellow townsman'); at *suas.* 6.27 he refers to a probable Córdoba as *municipe nostrum* ('a townsman of ours'); Mart. 1.61.7f. identifies Seneca the Elder, Seneca the Younger, and the poet Lucan as Córdoba. Seneca the Younger may refer to his birthplace in a fragment from *de matrimonio* (Haase 88) and again in epigram 19 (= *Anth. Lat.* 405 Shackleton Bailey); but the attribution of these passages to Seneca has been challenged. Griffin 1972: 17 notes Seneca the Younger's "general reticence about himself"; Sørensen 1984: 69 observes that "[Seneca] never refers to himself as Spaniard or shows any trace of Spanish national feeling."

¹⁰ E.g., *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*) 17.7, *nat.* 1.1.3, *epist.* 108.22. For analysis, see Griffin 1976: 34–36, Abel 1981b, and Griffin 1984: 14–16.

¹¹ Tac. *ann.* 14.56.1, discussed by Griffin 1976: 35f.

portion of his life in Rome.¹² Seneca's mother, Helvia, was from a prominent Baetican family, as indicated by the nomenclature on a dedicatory inscription from the town of Urgavo (mod. Arjona) about eighty kilometers east of Córdoba.¹³

Scholars have often assumed that the Annaei were *Hispanienses*, i.e., Spanish residents of Italian descent, rather than *Hispani*, of Spanish descent, based on the occurrence of similar names in Italy.¹⁴ Paul Veyne has recently suggested, however, based on demographic patterns, that it is more probable that Seneca's roots were in fact native Iberian rather than transplanted Italian.¹⁵ As a child, Seneca was taken to Rome by his mother's stepsister,¹⁶ a woman whose marriage to the eventual prefect of Egypt, C. Galerius,¹⁷ enabled Seneca's youthful convalescence in that Roman province and his later entry into Roman politics.¹⁸ The members of Seneca's family were, in effect, provincials on the make, eager to exploit the opportunities for political and social mobility provided by the Augustan settlement. In addition to his uncle Galerius, the prefect of Egypt, his father's friend (and eventual adoptive father of Seneca's older brother), the senator L. Iunius Gallio, may be supposed to have granted or extended access to high levels of the Roman political and economic elite.¹⁹ Seneca the Elder's ambitions for his sons, as advertised in the preface to book 2 of the *Controversiae*,²⁰ were to a large extent realized: the older brother, Annaeus Novatus, later L. Iunius Gallio Annaeanus, became a senator, suffect consul, and proconsul of Achaia,²¹

¹² Griffin 1972 on his life.

¹³ *CIL* II.2115, Vassileiou 1973, Gleason 1974, and Pflaum 1977, n. 438.

¹⁴ E.g., Syme 1964, appendix 80, followed by Griffin 1972: 2.

¹⁵ Veyne 2003: 1 f. with notes.

¹⁶ *Sen. dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).19.2.

¹⁷ For Galerius see *RE* 19 (1910): 598.

¹⁸ *Sen. dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).19.4. Seneca maintained connections with Egypt, including ownership of an estate there, into his later years: see Turcan 1967, Rostovtzeff 1998: 2.671, and Browne 1968: 17–24. To what extent Seneca's youthful sojourn in Egypt shaped his later literary and political activities is an open question.

¹⁹ On L. Iunius Gallio see *PIR* 1.756, *RE* 19 (1910): 1035–1039, and Griffin 1976: 45, 48.

²⁰ *Sen. contr.* 2 pr. 4. While scholars often read the *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae* of Seneca the Elder as the relatively insignificant reminiscences of a very old man, Bloomer 1997a is surely right to see the author as strategically placing his sons in a long tradition of Spanish learning and achievement. That tradition is, in turn, subtly represented as analogous to the traditions of the Roman elite: thus Seneca the Elder, in the course of writing to and instructing his sons, alludes to Cato the Elder's instruction of his son (*contr.* 1 pr. 9 f.) and to Asinius Pollio's role in the education of his grandson (*contr.* 4 pr. 2–4).

²¹ Dittenberger 1915: 2.801, *Acts* 18: 12, and *RE* 1.2 (1900): 2236–2239.

while his younger brother, Annaeus Mela, became an imperial procurator²² and father of the poet Lucan (Marcus Annaeus Lucanus).

As a Roman citizen of high rank, Seneca would have been expected to undergo training with a *grammaticus*, or teacher of literature; a rhetorician, or teacher of public speaking; and perhaps a philosopher.²³ Seneca refers to his *grammaticus* once,²⁴ and his easy familiarity with a wide range of Roman authors, as evinced in all of his writing, attests to the impact, direct or indirect, of early literary studies. As teacher of rhetoric and philosophy he names Papirius Fabianus, a man he (and his father) admired as both polymath and Latin stylist.²⁵ Unlike many young Romans, whose rhetorical training led almost immediately to public life, including pleading before tribunals, government service, and possible elected office, Seneca seems to have held back, for in a text written no earlier than AD 37 his father describes him and his older brother as still “preparing for the forum and public office.”²⁶ Yet within a few years Seneca was sufficiently renowned for his eloquence to have earned the notice—and antipathy—of the emperor Gaius (also known as Caligula), who described his style of speaking as “sand without lime” and “drunken revelry”²⁷ and, according to another ancient anecdote, intended to have him killed until an unnamed mistress observed that he was likely to die soon anyway of lung disease.²⁸ Whether or not the latter story obscures Seneca’s involvement with the conspiracy of Lepidus and Gaetulicus against Caligula, perhaps via a connection with the emperor’s sisters as some have proposed, it is certainly the case that Seneca’s evolving career

²² Tac. *ann.* 16.17.1–6, and *RE* 1.2 (1900): 2236.

²³ On the aims and impact of such training see Habinek 2005a: 60–78.

²⁴ Sen. *epist.* 58.5.

²⁵ Sen. *contr.* 2 pr. 1–4; Sen. *epist.* 40.12–14. In the latter passage, as well as in *epist.* 58.6 and *epist.* 100.1–9 Seneca discusses him in relationship to Cicero. Other references to Fabianus include Sen. *epist.* 52.11 and 100.1–9.

²⁶ Sen. *contr.* 2 pr. 4. Griffin 1976: 44 overinterprets the father’s language to suggest that it provides a precise date for Seneca’s quaestorship.

²⁷ The Latin phrases are *harena sine calce* and *comissiones meras* (Suet. *Cal.* 53). The latter contains a pun on the adjective *merus*, -a, -um which means ‘pure’ or ‘unadulterated’ but often refers to wine that has not been diluted with water. Seneca’s rhetoric, according to Gaius, is like the homeward procession that follows a party where everyone has drunk too much strong wine.

²⁸ Dio 59.19. Griffin 1976: 53–56 expresses undue skepticism for the hypotheses of Stewart 1953 and Lana 1955: 106–110, 115 that Seneca earned Gaius’s wrath because of his association with Gaetulicus’s conspiracy against him. Lana’s emphasis on the possible involvement of Gaius’s sisters and, in particular, of Seneca’s association with them, fits the better-documented pattern of Seneca’s later association with Livilla and Agrippina.

illustrates the prospects and pitfalls of both senatorial and court politics.²⁹ In AD 41, at the urging of Messalina, wife of the new emperor Claudius, Seneca was relegated to the isle of Corsica on a charge of adultery with Gaius's sister Livilla,³⁰ eventually to be recalled by another sister of Gaius, namely Agrippina, the new wife of Claudius and mother of soon-to-be emperor Nero.³¹

Of Seneca's life in exile on Corsica we know only what he tells us in his various writings dating to that period, namely that he spent a great deal of time on his studies.³² Like Cicero and Ovid before him, Seneca used his literary productivity as a way to maintain a presence in Rome during forced separation from it. So much is clear from both his *Consolation* to his mother Helvia (interestingly enough, on her grief over the loss of him) and his *Consolation to Polybius*, Claudius's powerful freedman, whose brother had recently died. The former work can be understood as reinforcing Seneca's ties with his family and their associates, the latter as an honorific offering to an important figure in the imperial household in the hope of a return benefit, presumably in the form of recall from exile. Such was in time obtained not through Polybius, but thanks to the removal of Messalina, who was eventually executed for adultery and, at least in Tacitus's account, general recklessness, and the ascendancy of Agrippina, who, although the niece of Claudius, was married to him with the fulsome approval of the Senate and people.³³ According to Tacitus and others, Seneca was recalled by Agrippina to serve as tutor of her son Nero,³⁴ whom she was grooming as heir to the throne in place of Messalina's son Britannicus. We may reasonably surmise that Agrippina would not have effected this arrangement without at least some prior familiarity with Seneca's loyalty and trustworthiness. Reliance on such private connections need not be seen as contradictory to the publicly announced privileging of Seneca due to the "renown of his intellectual

²⁹ On the conspiracy see Simpson 1980, Barrett 1989, chapter 6, and Rowe 2002: 168f. Seneca's friend and later addressee, C. Lucilius Iunior, was also caught up in the paranoia surrounding the conspiracy, at least as Seneca tells it (*nat.* 4 pr. 15f.).

³⁰ Relegation, which is the precise term for Seneca's removal (schol. Iuv. 5.109), was generally a milder punishment than exile and may have allowed Seneca to retain a significant portion of his wealth. On the various types of punitive removal from Rome under the early Empire, see Brunt 1961: esp. 202–204. On Messalina's role see Dio 60.8.6.

³¹ Tac. *ann.* 12.8.2.

³² Sen. *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 1.2 and 7.9.

³³ Tac. *ann.* 12.1.1–7.3 on the betrothal and marriage of Claudius and Agrippina.

³⁴ He is called *magister* or 'teacher' in Tac. *ann.* 12.8.2 and *praeceptor* in 15.62.2.

pursuits" (*claritudo studiorum*),³⁵ a motif that recurs in ancient accounts of Seneca's lifetime and in later reflections on his cultural significance.³⁶

With his return from exile, Seneca also assumes a leading role in the ancient historiographical tradition, which is centered on the lives of emperors and their relationships to courtiers, aristocrats, and military commanders. In recognition of his special relationship to Nero, he comes to be identified as 'friend of the prince' (*amicus principis*),³⁷ a role that compensated for its lack of institutional definition with an array of distinguished precedents. Hellenistic kings had had "friends" who were, in effect, advisers and public relations specialists,³⁸ and Roman figures like Agrippa and Maecenas had occupied much the same position, even when they also held legally recognized posts, from early in the Augustan regime onward.³⁹ Agrippina would have publicized Seneca's relationship to her twelve-year-old son Nero as part of her project of grooming the latter to succeed Claudius. Indeed, associating Nero's public pronouncements with Seneca was a pattern that persisted throughout Nero's reign, even after Agrippina's death: we hear of Seneca's composition of Nero's funeral oration for his predecessor Claudius in AD 54;⁴⁰ the surviving Senecan treatise, *De Clementia* (*Concerning Mercy*), dated to AD 55 or 56, seems designed in part to reassure the dominant class that Nero's murder of Britannicus is the end, not the beginning of bloodshed;⁴¹ and, with tragic irony, Seneca was compelled to compose a letter to the Senate justifying the murder of Agrippina, the chief booster of his meteoric ascent.⁴²

³⁵ For the expression *claritudo studiorum*, see Tac. *ann.* 12.8.2. For its meaning and significance, see Habinek 2000.

³⁶ Evidence gathered and discussed in Habinek 2000.

³⁷ Tac. *ann.* 14.54.3 has Seneca refer to himself as among Nero's *seniores amici*. Seneca also held the official position of suffect consul for six months in 55 or 56 AD, which in turn entitled him to be regarded as one of the leading members of the Senate.

³⁸ E.g., Savalli-Lestrade 1998. Tacitus has Seneca himself cite the precedents of Agrippa and Maecenas for his relationship to Nero: see *ann.* 14.54.3. Seneca's description of them in *ben.* 6.33.3f. suggests that in his view they did not always fulfill the role of "friend" appropriately: they would have dissimulated in the case of Augustus's daughter's scandalous behavior, rather than speaking candidly, as was the historical expectation of friends.

³⁹ Tacitus has Nero invoke L. Vitellius, in his relationship to Claudius, as precedent for Seneca's position: *ann.* 14.56.1.

⁴⁰ Tac. *ann.* 13.3.1–3 discusses the funeral oration; *ann.* 13.11.2 refers to Seneca's "frequent" composition of speeches delivered by Nero.

⁴¹ On the context and aims of Seneca's treatise *de clementia* see, among others, Griffin 1976: 133–171, and Lana 2001a (with reference to his extensive earlier work on the topic).

⁴² Tac. *ann.* 14.10.3–11.3 discusses the letter in some detail.

Historians both ancient and modern disagree about the extent and nature of Seneca's contribution to imperial governance under Nero. The discussion is complicated by the fact that ancient writers on politics tended to think concretely in terms of personal connections and reactive decisions rather than abstractly in terms of broad goals, agendas, and strategies. Unfortunately, this limitation in the representation of politics is too easily taken to correspond to a limitation in the actual performance and intentions of political actors. Thus the failure of the ancient sources to say that Nero and Seneca had a broad strategic understanding of the needs of the Empire does not mean they lacked one. Indeed, at least two themes recur throughout the Senecan ascendancy, one being a return to civilian governance after the Claudian swerve toward military autocracy, the other being a continuation of the Claudian interest in economic infrastructure and the rationalized use of urban space. With respect to the first strategic goal, we may note Seneca's partnering with Burrus, the newly appointed prefect of the Praetorian Guard, whose prior experience was chiefly financial rather than military in nature.⁴³ Through such an arrangement the Neronian regime sought (ultimately unsuccessfully) to integrate the praetorians into civilian lines of authority and prevent their persistence as, in effect, kingmakers—a role they had played in the elevation of both Gaius and Claudius.

Moreover, Nero's deep engagement in diplomacy and his failure to take on a distinct military role for himself stand in contrast to Claudius's much-derided leadership of an expedition to Britain.⁴⁴ Indeed, it is striking to note the extent to which Tacitus's account of Nero's reign is replete with diplomatic missions, meetings with ambassadors, etc. in contrast to the highly militarized narratives of earlier emperors. The remark Tacitus attributes to unnamed members of the population, namely that "more was accomplished

⁴³ Veyne 2003: 20 following Syme 1963: 2, 591. Claudius had shown special favor toward the praetorians: Dio 59.2.3, 60.12.2, Suet. *Claud.* 10.4, and Griffin 1984: 203.

⁴⁴ Suet. *Claud.* 17.1–3 reports that Claudius undertook this 'modest' (*modica*) enterprise for the specific purpose of being able to celebrate a triumph. He refers to the same expedition in strikingly different terms in *Vesp.* 4.1f. Dio 60.23.1–6 contrasts the shortness of time Claudius spent in Britain with the elaborate nature of the celebrations upon his return to Rome. It is in this context that Dio also notes Claudius's usurpation for himself and his military of initiatives in foreign policy that had traditionally been the prerogative of the Senate and people. Sen. *apocol.* 12 presents a chorus as singing a mock-heroic dirge celebrating Claudius's military achievements and his ability to discern the truth in trials without even hearing evidence. In Tac. *ann.* 14.55.3 Nero contrasts the militarized youth of Augustus with Seneca's and his own lack of participation in military activities. Griffin 1984: 231 notes that "whereas Gaius and Claudius each felt impelled to take the field personally after two years in office," Nero waited at least nine, possibly eleven years.

by auspices and counsel than by weapons and brawn”⁴⁵ seems to summarize foreign policy during the ascendancy of Seneca and Burrus. Even the talented general Cn. Domitius Corbulo, who held command in the East during much of Nero’s reign, achieved as much by shrewd manipulation of his enemies’ fears and interests as by actual combat.⁴⁶

As for economic policy and other plans for infrastructure, we must read between the lines of the scandal-driven narratives of the ancient historians to discern the role of the imperial household in managing affairs of state. Yes, Seneca was phenomenally wealthy, but that wealth manifested itself (and was no doubt in part produced by) up-to-date agrarian methods and a more or less new mode of international banking,⁴⁷ not to mention imperial bequests. During the period of Seneca’s close association with Nero financial reforms improved the health of the imperial treasury,⁴⁸ thereby providing the wherewithal for the public works projects that characterized Nero’s regime both before and after the infamous fire of July 64.⁴⁹

A recent careful reading of references to city life throughout Seneca’s literary career has identified changes in the city of Rome as visualized by

⁴⁵ Tac. *ann.* 13.6.4. In letter 73, a treatise clearly intended for the eyes or ears of Nero, Seneca gives thanks for a leader (*gubernator*) who removes the necessity of bearing arms, serving on night watches, guarding the city walls, etc. (*epist.* 73.9). Also relevant is Seneca’s promulgation of an ideal of *securitas*—freedom from anxiety—as political and personal goal: see the excellent discussion in Lana 2001b.

⁴⁶ For background on Corbulo and a discussion of his career see Syme 1970; on battles and diplomatic activities in and about Armenia see Tac. *ann.* 13.34.2–13.42.3; Griffin 1976: 223–229, 462–466.

⁴⁷ Following Veyne 2003: 9–15, this seems the best way to understand Dio’s description of Seneca’s loans to British chieftains (Dio 62.2.2). Tacitus may allude to this type of activity as well when he has Seneca mention his “extensive involvement in lending at interest” (*tam lato faenore: ann.* 14.53.5) as a prerogative he owes to Nero—i.e., lending that “extends” beyond the close circle of Roman friends. Presumably Seneca’s fortune was made available to finance the “development” of Britain, a process that had to be revoked when it became more important to fund other endeavors. Griffin 1976: 246, with reasoning characteristic of that of many modern historians, assigns Seneca’s withdrawal of the loans from Britain to “prudence not malice.” But why should either character trait be relevant? Seneca was acting as the government’s banker and did what was thought to be best for the government. See also Levick 2003. On the relationship between public and private property, very different in antiquity than today, see Seneca’s concise remarks in *benef.* 7.3.2 f.

⁴⁸ Tac. *ann.* 13.50.1–51.2. Cizek 1984: 135–139 suggests that the Senate’s ultimate refusal to follow through on Nero’s desire to move from indirect to direct taxation (and thus significantly reduce the role of intermediary corporations run by rich equestrians and by or for senatorial backers) was the turning point in Nero’s relations with that institution. The use of Seneca’s private fortune as a basis for investment in Britain can plausibly be interpreted as one aspect of the Neronian regime’s strategy of centralizing finances in the imperial household.

⁴⁹ It should be noted, however, that by the time Galba succeeded Nero in AD 69, the treasury was bankrupt.

Senecan prose: from crooked narrow streets to sweeping boulevards, large-scale baths, and theaters large enough to hold the entire citizenry.⁵⁰ Seneca's moralizing tone rejects the distractions that both forms of urbanization create for the elite soul in search of serenity, but the changing background conditions taken for granted by the language of the ethical treatises can only have been created by impetus and direction from the highest levels of government, in which Seneca was a key participant.⁵¹

Yet the historiographical tradition, fixated as it was and is on the tense relations between emperor and elites, prefers stories of court intrigue to debates over policy, investment, and social goals. In the context of such stories, Seneca emerges as an exceptionally important player, one who worked with Burrus and others to strike a balance between Nero and Agrippina, to reassure the upper classes of Nero's good intentions, to settle old scores against remnants of Claudius's rule, and, finally, to deny legitimacy to Nero once he began to behave in a way that offended too large a segment of elite and popular opinion.

Two episodes can stand for many. According to Tacitus, when Nero began to distance himself from Agrippina due to her overbearing involvement in personal and public affairs, she responded by making incestuous advances toward him.⁵² Such behavior might have shocked even jaded Romans; more importantly, if successful in uniting mother and son it would have reduced or eliminated the influence of other counselors, such as Seneca. And so the latter recruited the freedwoman Acte, of whom the princeps was already enamored,⁵³ to inform Nero of the dangers of his behavior, especially the risk of losing support among the troops. When the hostility Nero felt toward Agrippina turned murderous, Seneca and Burrus, having lost the ability to triangulate with the emperor's mother, experienced a sharp decline in influence. Burrus's death in AD 62 further weakened Seneca's position, as did Nero's maturation (he was now 25 years old) and growing comfort with the exercise of power.

Seneca sought to remove himself from the heights of power in a conversation with Nero presented by Tacitus as a kind of tragic *agon*, the only such episode in the surviving *Annals*.⁵⁴ Nero neither released Seneca nor

⁵⁰ Sommella 2000.

⁵¹ It may also be worth noting in this context that as procurator, Seneca's younger brother Mela had responsibility for revitalization of the capital city: see Cizek 1982: 104.

⁵² Tac. *ann.* 14.2.2.

⁵³ Tac. *ann.* 13.12.1.

⁵⁴ Tac. *ann.* 14.53.1–56.3.

solidified his position. Seneca retreated to the countryside, refused to greet clients and petitioners, and set about re-positioning himself, as he did during the period of his relegation, through literary activity. In these final years of his life he composed a massive work on *Natural Questions* (interestingly, a return to a type of inquiry that had occupied him during his previous removal from the seat of power)⁵⁵ and a series of quasi-private letters addressed to a friend and associate, C. Lucilius, a younger contemporary who held various equestrian procuratorships under Claudius and Nero.⁵⁶ Just as the *Consolations* written from Corsica sought to manage relations with friends and foes alike, so too the *Letters to Lucilius* or *Epistulae Morales*, as they are also known, play a double game. On the one hand, they seek to make clear to the princes that his semi-retired minister is engaged in philosophical, not conspiratorial activity.⁵⁷ The composition of the letters, as if reflecting the actual day-to-day experience of their writer, serves as documentation of political withdrawal.

Yet at the same time, the letters speak of preparation for death, of the possibility of undergoing savage violence at the instigation of “one more powerful” (*potentioris: epist. 14.3*). The sage, according to Seneca, shuns a power out to get him (*nocituram potentiam: epist. 14.8*) while taking care that the shunning not be obvious. “An important component of security,” he writes, “is not to admit one is seeking it” (*pars enim securitatis et in hoc est, non ex professo eam petere: epist. 14.9*). In effect, Seneca both displays his retirement and explains why he is doing so in the same collection of letters.⁵⁸ He speaks simultaneously to Nero (or at least to those who would denounce him to Nero) and to others who are potentially sympathetic to his plight. Ultimately, Seneca addresses his readership as he does himself, arguing that when the time comes it is always easy to take one’s own life (*epist. 70*). A letter that exhorts the neophyte Stoic to accept responsibility for the conditions and mode of living (by acknowledging the ease of dying) in effect exhorts its own writer to face his dire predicament with serenity.

⁵⁵ Sen. *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*), 20.1f.

⁵⁶ RE 13.2 (1927): 1645, C. Lucilius Iunior. Lucilius is also the addressee of *De providentia* (Sen. *dial.* 1) and *Naturales quaestiones*. In *epist.* 34.2 Seneca declares to Lucilius: “I attach you to myself; you are my project” (*adsero te mihi; meum opus es*). Such language, combined with the fact that Lucilius is the diminutive of Lucius (Seneca’s own praenomen), as A. Corbeill reminds me, suggests a different conceptualization of the boundary between self and other than the one that prevails in modern societies.

⁵⁷ This is the interpretation of Cizek 1972: 155 followed by Veyne 2003: 160–164.

⁵⁸ Cf. the similar assessment of Veyne 2003: 157–167.

This dual enterprise—steering clear of the emperor while making it obvious how and why he was doing so—served Seneca well right up to his death. Implicated in the Pisonian Conspiracy against Nero in April of AD 65, Seneca (along with his brothers and nephew) was, in effect, invited to put an end to his own life. Even as he denied complicity in the plot against Nero, we learn (from Tacitus and his pro-Senecan source⁵⁹) that some within the conspiracy were plotting to kill not only Nero, but also Calpurnius Piso, and place Seneca himself upon the throne.⁶⁰ The plot within a plot caught the imagination of later generations of Romans, who saw in Seneca's distancing of himself from Nero the possibility of an emperor selected on the basis of cultural competence rather than birth or military achievement.⁶¹ So compelling is Seneca's renown that it is the military men within the conspiracy who are said to favor his elevation.⁶² While some dismiss the notion of Seneca as emperor as “appealing historical dream,” it is not clear that Nero saw the possibility as so fantastic.⁶³ For what other reason did he insist on Seneca's death? The latter had already ceded his immense wealth to the emperor,⁶⁴ and, indeed, had graciously thanked the emperor—in person, according to Tacitus,⁶⁵ and certainly in published form, as letter 73 makes clear—for making it possible for him and other philosophers to pursue their studies unimpeded.⁶⁶ Griffin's answer—“to remove the last goad to [Nero's] flagging conscience”—seems a bit fanciful and, if nothing else, reveals her acquiescence in the one-sided view of Nero as irrational, guilt-ridden monster presented by senatorial historiography.⁶⁷ The most likely reason is that Nero regarded Seneca as he, or his mother, had previously

⁵⁹ For Tacitus's reliance on the martyrology of Seneca's friend Fabius Rusticus, see Townend 1964 and Champlin 2003: 40–50.

⁶⁰ Tac. *ann.* 15.65.1 identifies the military tribune Subrius Flavus and unnamed centurions as those rumored to be planning to make Seneca emperor.

⁶¹ Habinek 2000, esp. 278–284.

⁶² Indeed, even Dio thinks that L. Faenius Rufus, co-prefect of the Praetorian Guard (together with Ofonius Tigellinus, see Tac. *ann.* 14.51.2f.) was Seneca's chief collaborator in the plot to place Seneca on the throne.

⁶³ The phrase is that of Veyne 2003: 168, who makes the equally puzzling claim that “Nero was [...] too deprived of political sense to kill in a calculated manner” (2003: 167).

⁶⁴ Dio 62.25.3.

⁶⁵ Tac. *ann.* 14.53.1–3.

⁶⁶ Veyne 2003: 160 endorses Cizek's understanding of this letter as indicating, despite its fawning tone, that Seneca has “no intention of becoming involved with the newly adopted policies of Nero's regime” (Cizek 1972: 155).

⁶⁷ Griffin 1976: 367. In her book on Nero, Griffin describes him as “young, vain and insecure” while also considering “difficulties inherent in the political system of the Principate” (1984: 185).

regarded Britannicus, Iunius Silanus, Rubellius Plautus, and even Octavia, and as he would come to regard Corbulo—namely, as rivals or rallying points for potential opposition.⁶⁸

Two plausible but strikingly different accounts of Seneca's death survive. The early third-century historian Dio, a Roman senator writing in Greek, tells us nothing of the order from Nero, but focuses on four key points: Seneca wanted his wife Paulina to die with him, he attended to last-minute literary affairs, his death was hastened by soldiers, and he died in spite of his earlier attempts to appease Nero.⁶⁹ Tacitus, writing about fifty years after the events, but generally understood to rely on the account of Seneca's contemporary and friend, Fabius Rusticus,⁷⁰ creates a more elaborate and detailed scenario in which Seneca seeks to revise his will for the benefit of his friends, but is forbidden; dictates final words to his scribes; argues against, but ultimately accepts his wife's own determination to join him in suicide; has his veins cut, but also imbibes (to no avail) the hemlock he has stored against such an eventuality; and finally suffocates to death, having been placed in a warm bath—but not before remarking that the splash of water from the tub was a libation to Jupiter the Liberator.⁷¹ Dio's version emphasizes the relentlessness of Nero, whose antipathy grinds down even the most pragmatic and self-interested of fellow Romans, while Tacitus makes of Seneca a martyr for political freedom and hero of the Stoic process of self-transformation.⁷²

Despite the best efforts of scholars, attempts to separate fact from fiction in the narratives are probably futile: as recent scholarship has shown, even the relatively recent and significantly better-attested death of the American president Abraham Lincoln prompted conflicting eye-witness accounts of the assassin's words, the size of the room in which Lincoln died, and the language (and ideological substance) of the death announcement by Lincoln's friend and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton.⁷³ Whether we attribute such confusion to the high emotions of the occasion or to the calculated attempts of survivors to lay claim to the legacy of the deceased hero, or both, the truth of the event resides not in unverifiable "facts" but in the constellation of issues and problems raised by conflicting claims.

⁶⁸ To her credit, in a later study (1984: 189–196) Griffin does consider the challenge posed to Nero by the proliferation of potential rivals, especially the increasing number of descendants.

⁶⁹ Dio 2.25.1–3.

⁷⁰ See note 59 *supra*.

⁷¹ Tac. *ann.* 15.62.1–64.4.

⁷² The best discussion is that of Veyne 2003: 157–172.

⁷³ A. Gopnik, "Angels and Ages: Lincoln's Language and its Legacy," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2007 (www.newyorker.com accessed on July 16, 2007).

In Lincoln's case, the debate is to a large extent about the secular versus religious significance of his legacy (e.g., did Stanton say "he belongs to the ages" or "he belongs to the angels"?), and something similar might be said of the contrast between the accounts of Dio and Tacitus. Neither writer finds it necessary to comment on the underlying pragmatism of the choice to commit suicide (they, like their readers, would have understood that in so doing Seneca protected the terms of his will),⁷⁴ but in one case that pragmatism is all there is, in the other it is subordinated to the more idealistic aim of exemplifying (as Tacitus had said of his own father-in-law⁷⁵) how to be a great man under a bad emperor.⁷⁶

THE SOCIAL SELF

The variant death scenes presented by Dio and Tacitus illustrate the ultimate indistinguishability of biography from social concerns and constraints—exactly as Seneca's own Stoicism would have predicted. Instead of amassing indecisive arguments for or against the "truth" of a given version,⁷⁷ we would do better to probe more deeply into the issues highlighted by ancient accounts of Seneca's death as well as of his life. While such an inquiry can move in an almost unlimited number of directions, six aspects of Seneca's relationship to Roman society will concern us here: the use of writing to extend the self beyond the boundaries of time and space; changing gender roles as illustrated by his relationship with his wife; the psychological and ideological effects of continuing reliance on slaves in all aspects of life; the tension between competing models of economic exchange made manifest in the stories and accusations concerning Seneca's wealth; the deployment of Stoic philosophy as an authoritative generalizing discourse at the expense of the proliferating efforts of specialists; and the reorientation of Roman life from past to future as a distinguishing characteristic of the late Julio-Claudian

⁷⁴ Veyne 2003: 166 following Tac. *ann.* 6.29.

⁷⁵ [*P]osse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse* (Tac. *Agr.* 42).

⁷⁶ I am not persuaded by the view that Tacitus undercuts the authority of Seneca's death scene by describing the suicide of Petronius, Nero's *arbiter elegantiae*, who seems to have staged his death as, at least in part, a parody of Seneca's (Tac. *ann.* 16.18.1–19.3). Different need not mean better or worse; and in any event, Petronius's death was as appropriate for an Epicurean under duress as Seneca's was for a Stoic facing comparable pressure: see Veyne 2003: 172.

⁷⁷ See, for example, Griffin 1976: 371, who says there is "sufficient justification for adopting [Tacitus's] version of the facts."

period. By examining each of these topics, however briefly, we can begin to understand the significance of Seneca's life for his contemporaries and for ourselves.

Writing

To start with the dual death scenes recounted above, we notice that the importance of writing and the problem of Paulina (will she die with Seneca or not?) figure in the narratives of both Dio and Tacitus.⁷⁸ What might these features signify more generally? Tacitus tells us not only that Seneca composed death-bed remarks that survived to his own day, but that he referred, in effect, to his large corpus of philosophical treatises in seeking to regulate the emotional response of friends who witnessed his death. As Tacitus puts it, "partly by conversation and partly in the more intense role of a reprimander (*coercentis*), he recalled those present from their tears to fortitude, asking repeatedly where were the precepts of their wisdom (*praecepta sapientiae*)? Where, after contemplating it for so many years, was that reasoning (*ratio*) in the face of looming adversity?" (Tac. *ann.* 15.62.2).⁷⁹

The diction and phrasing of the Latin original resonate with the language of Seneca's philosophical treatises, works in which he cajoles and upbraids, reasons, and issues precepts, all with the goal of making the reader/listener *securus*, i.e., free from anxiety concerning the non-necessities of life and the irresistible dictates of fate.⁸⁰ Through his writings Seneca makes of Stoicism a strategy for re-ordering oneself in relationship to fate, for living the realization that all are integrated with all through the dynamic, corporeal life force that permeates the universe.⁸¹ In his death throes Seneca refers, almost as an afterthought, to Jupiter the Liberator, a symbol of the liberation achieved by

⁷⁸ Dio 62.25.1 says that Seneca wanted Paulina to die with him; Tac. *ann.* 15.63.1f. instead has Seneca acquiesce in Paulina's own wish to join him. Dio 62.25.2 says that Seneca revised one book and deposited others with friends out of fear that Nero would destroy them, while Tac. *ann.* 15.63.3 refers explicitly to Seneca's final dictations to his scribes and implicitly (passage cited in text) to his whole body of philosophical writing and teaching.

⁷⁹ *Simul lacrimas eorum, modo sermone, modo intentior, in modum coercentis, ad firmitudinem reuocat, rogicans ubi praecepta sapientiae, ubi tot per annos meditata ratio aduersum iminentia*; translation in text is from Woodman 2004: 335.

⁸⁰ On the dynamic relationship between reason and exhortation in Seneca's writing, see Habinek 1989: 238–254 and Inwood 1995. On *securitas* in Seneca's writings and Nero's political program, see Lana 2001b.

⁸¹ The force known as *pneuma* in Greek, *spiritus* in Latin. For its corporeality, and the implications thereof, see Sambursky 1959, Reesor 1989: 2–21, and Rosenmeyer 1989.

the man who truly does not care whether he lives or dies, as long as he behaves virtuously.⁸² Tacitus dramatizes the lessons of Seneca's philosophy, while at the same time pointing the reader in the direction of his writings. Even Dio's account intimates that Seneca regards his books as a way of extending his life beyond the bounds of death: why else his final care to preserve them? Seneca's actions thus give insight into a widespread Roman practice that is based on a belief, not a metaphor: i.e., that the self really does extend beyond the limits of biological life, and that such extension may come in the form of reanimation through reading of an author's works. No wonder terms like 'Cicero' and 'Seneca' refer interchangeably to the man and his writings.

Gender

As for Paulina, her participation in Seneca's final act of suicide speaks to the growing, but conflicted, acceptance of women as independent actors under the early Principate. Liberated from their male relatives' exclusive legal authority by a set of laws under the emperor Augustus,⁸³ women begin to assume a more visible role in political, economic, and social life. The very fact that Paulina's agency—or lack thereof—is a topic of controversy speaks to the new condition of women and a corresponding shift in the expectations of ancient readers. The issue, as Seneca sees it (at least in Tacitus's account), is whether Paulina will live to carry on Seneca's reputation, die and thus acquire fame for herself, or worst of all, live just long enough to suffer further injustice. The last point is of special concern to Seneca because of his particular love for her (*sibi unice dilectam*: Tac. *ann.* 15.63.2). While such a feeling is potentially present in any marital relationship, it assumes greater significance, once again, in an era when a weakening of the affective ties of clan (*gens*) leads to an intensification of the pair bond.⁸⁴ Paulina's presence in the suicide narrative also speaks to the role of women as bearers of unifying cultural traditions, inheritors of both the real and the symbolic capital of their spouses: Seneca's suicide is itself, as suggested above, a strategy for making sure his property is transferred to his heirs; and as heir, in every respect, Paulina is a potential

⁸² On the double significance of Jupiter Liberator, as symbol of catastrophe forestalled and of Stoic reason, see Veyne 2003: 186.

⁸³ Especially the much-misunderstood *lex Iulia de adulteriis*. For proper interpretation, see Daube 1972, Daube 1986, Cohen 1991, and Cantarella 1991. Daube's observation (1986) that legal personhood carries a high price is startlingly relevant to Paulina's situation.

⁸⁴ Habinek 1997.

continuer of both her husband's and her father's traditions (she is, after all, a Pompey). Finally, Paulina's presence reminds us that women's relationships to philosophy are a leitmotif of Seneca's life: his father tells his mother not to study it (a fact for which Seneca consoles her after his father's death); Agrippina tells him not to teach it to Nero; a fragmentary essay *On Matrimony* raises the possibility of a couple's joint quest for virtue; and both Dio and Tacitus imply that Paulina had learned wisdom from her husband.⁸⁵ Tacitus even has Seneca assign to Paulina the glory (*gloria*) and renown (*claritudo*) that he himself had sought for his philosophical achievements.⁸⁶

Slavery

We can press the Tacitean death scene yet further for the access it offers to other dimensions of the social self in the middle of the first century AD. As Tacitus reports, when the conspiracy against Nero was being investigated, Seneca was denounced by one Natalis for having said that his well-being depended on that of Piso. When the accusation was transmitted to Seneca, rather than panicking, he responded assertively, reminding Nero that (among other things) "he did not have a ready temperament for sycophancy—which was known to Nero, who had more often experienced free speaking (*libertas*) from Seneca than servitude (*servitium*)."⁸⁷

The contrast between freedom and slavery may seem to be a rhetorical one,⁸⁸ since Seneca was in no legal sense anyone's slave, but it points us to features of the death scene too easily overlooked, especially the role of slaves within it. It is slaves and freedmen who bind Paulina's wounds

⁸⁵ On Helvia and philosophy see *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).15.1, 17.3. On Agrippina's opposition to Nero's study of philosophy, see Suet. *Nero* 52. The fragments of the *De matrimonio* (Haase 1853: 3.428–434) refer to Terentia's acquisition of wisdom from Cicero, to women's capacity for virtue, and to the sage's need to love his wife judiciously and not out of affect or desire. The preservation of the fragments seems somewhat skewed by Jerome's desire to use them to support his own views on chastity as the best moral state for a Christian.

⁸⁶ Tac. *ann.* 15.63.2; cf. Habinek 2000. As Andreas Heil reminds me, Martial 10.64 associates Lucan's widow with his poetic glory long after his death. In addition to the issue of women's status and capabilities, Seneca is a touchstone for changing concepts of masculinity, especially for a senatorial class that has much less opportunity to demonstrate military prowess than it had had under the republic: for ample discussion, see Habinek 1997: 137–150, Habinek 2000, and Roller 2001: 99–107.

⁸⁷ Tac. *ann.* 15.61.1, trans. Woodman 2004: 334, with modifications.

⁸⁸ See Roller 2001: 213–288 for an excellent discussion of the use of the language of slavery to negotiate the new relationship between princeps and elites during the Julio-Claudian period. Armisen-Marchetti 1989: 113–115 documents the pervasiveness of slave imagery throughout Seneca's writings.

at the order of the soldiers (Tac. *ann.* 15.64.1) and, apparently, slaves who help the enfeebled Seneca into the asphyxiating bath, for it is they who are accidentally splashed by him (*ann.* 15.64.4). It may well be a slave, or at least a freedman, to whom Paulina refers when she demands the hand of the “striker” (*percussor*: *ann.* 15.63.1), and a slave (or slaves) who delivers the blow that severs simultaneously the veins of husband and wife.⁸⁹ The scene illustrates the omnipresence of slaves in elite Roman life—even at the most intimate and emotionally charged moments—but also reminds us of how easily slaves can be overlooked by modern scholarly commentary. For all commentators on the scene, Seneca’s invocation of Jupiter Liberator refers either to Stoic philosophy (as above), civic religion, or Socratic precedent.⁹⁰ But the invocation is prompted by his accidental splashing of nearby slaves with the water from his bath. Leaving aside how such slaves might have taken Seneca’s final sharp reference to “liberation” (was he prevented from manumitting them when denied access to his will by Nero’s thugs?), we might at least see the obsession with freedom on the part of Roman Stoics such as Seneca for what it is: a psychological and ideological response to the ubiquity of slavery and to the master class’s dependence on it.⁹¹

Elite anxiety about slavery finds ample expression in Seneca’s writings, especially in two of his most famous letters. In one, letter 47, he makes the case for the merciful treatment of slaves, without challenging the institution of slavery per se. The letter is a direct attempt to ameliorate the fear provoked by an expanding and diverse slave population in the city of Rome.⁹² In

⁸⁹ The Latin says that “they opened their arms with the same blow” (*eodem ictu brachia ferro exsoluunt*, Tac. *ann.* 15.63.2). But how could they (Seneca and Paulina) have delivered such a blow together? It seems more likely that the Latin here, as frequently elsewhere, includes within an action attributed to a master the actual action of a slave or slaves: on this linguistic feature of classical Latin, see Reay 2003 and 2005. To Reay’s dossier we might add Sen. *nat.* 3.7.1 in which Seneca describes himself as “a diligent digger of vines”—almost certainly what he means is that he orders his slaves to be diligent diggers of vines. It is hard to imagine Seneca doing the dirty work of the vast vineyards he possessed. Also relevant is Sen. *epist.* 12.2, in which he describes himself as having planted the plane trees at his villa: *ego illas posueram*. *Ego* here would seem to encompass much more than the modern “I,” limited as it is to a single, distinct bodily organism. The expansive self of the Roman aristocrat could encompass family members as well: see Sen. *benef.* 5.19.8f.

⁹⁰ Veyne 2003: 187 notes that the civic Jupiter rescues a community from potential enslavement, but he fails to draw the connection to the slaves in Seneca’s household or to the Roman experience of slavery more generally.

⁹¹ For the emergence of freedom as an ideal in the context of slave societies, see the classic historical and sociological study of Patterson 1991.

⁹² For the master-class’s reaction to the expansion of slavery, see the remarks attributed to Cassius Longinus in AD 61 (Tac. *ann.* 14.44.1–4). Seneca’s letter recommends easy coexistence

another, letter 70, which ostensibly constitutes a defense of suicide, Seneca in fact exposes the cruelty that sustains the Roman slave economy, while also equating his position, at the mercy of Nero, to that of a slave, at the mercy of his master. “Law eternal has brought about nothing better than this,” he writes. “There is one entrance to life, but many exits” (Sen. *epist.* 70.14). The exits Seneca chooses to describe are those of Socrates and a noble Roman lady, but also, in a rising crescendo, the suicides of gladiators, slaves, and criminals who have been thrown to the beasts. Each finds a way to avoid the torture (*tormentum*: Sen. *epist.* 70.11, 70.15) his superiors have prepared for him.

For Seneca, as for many Roman writers, the experience of dominating intensifies the fear of being dominated.⁹³ This double bind—relying on slaves and therefore fearing the condition of enslavement—may have been particularly intense for Seneca and others of his background, since there is good reason to believe that the use of slave labor increased significantly in the late Republic and early Principate, especially in Seneca’s home province of Baetica,⁹⁴ where there also seems to have been an expansion of the class of *honesti*—men who met the income qualification (by one calculation, 2.6 times subsistence) for service on local juries,⁹⁵ and who constituted, in one historian’s view, the prime beneficiaries of economic growth.⁹⁶ Seneca’s constant reversion to the topic of slavery, directly or indirectly, transfers to the literary register the social realities of his era. Whether Seneca himself treated his slaves cruelly or harshly—an unanswerable question—is less important than the testimony he provides for Roman awareness of the peculiarity of the institution of slavery and Roman understanding of the complex relationship between the elite self and the system of domination in which it takes form.⁹⁷

with slaves in order to secure their loyalty and repeats the usual Stoic exhortation against “enslavement” to one’s vices and desires. Seneca also taps fear of slaves in *De clementia* 1.24 and awareness of their potential power over their masters in *De beneficiis* 3.23.1–4.

⁹³ For an interesting parallel, see Patrick Henry’s famous speech before the Virginia House of Burgesses. Henry exhorts his fellow slave owners to resist the British (“give me liberty or give me death”) by summoning up images of the British doing to the Virginians what the Virginians have license to do to their slaves. On the frequency of slave suicide in Rome, see Bradley 1994: 112 f.

⁹⁴ Alföldy 1996 summarizes the evidence and notes that the expansion of slavery corresponds to a broader process of social differentiation. See also Štearman et al. 1987.

⁹⁵ Haley 2003. Haley’s fullest evidence is for a later period than the life of Seneca, i.e., 70–190 AD, but the various trends he describes clearly have their start in earlier periods.

⁹⁶ Haley 2003: 3–5.

⁹⁷ For further discussion of the role of literature in maintaining structures of domination, especially slavery, see Fitzgerald 2000 and Habinek 2005c. McCarthy 2000 and Roller 2001

Wealth and Economic Transformation

From the power of writing and issues of gender and slavery, we move to consideration of Seneca in relationship to the imperial economy. As Evan Haley notes, a new scholarly consensus holds that during the Julio-Claudian period the Roman imperial economy experienced real growth, especially in the settled western provinces such as Baetica.⁹⁸ The triumphant rise of the Annaei, including the entry of Seneca and his brother Gallio into the Roman Senate, was surely spurred in part by that growth. Indeed, the Senate persisted as an important institution under the Principate because its members represented the economic elite, both landed and commercial, without whom the Empire could not function. Turnover in the Senate's membership tracked both economic and military success throughout the Empire.⁹⁹ But the expansion of wealth, combined with the shift in identity of those who controlled it (i.e., from a handful of old Roman families to a broadly based Italian aristocracy to an evolving pan-Mediterranean elite), naturally generated hostility, concern, and misunderstanding among various parties. This aspect of political and social life manifests itself in the accusations directed against Seneca concerning his extraordinary wealth and in Seneca's concern throughout his writings with the problem of the reflective individual's proper relationship to ownership and consumption.¹⁰⁰ The clash between the two phenomena (personal wealth versus philosophical belittlement of possession) led in antiquity and beyond to charges of hypocrisy, but once again the ethical dimension is less interesting and less easy to resolve than the social.

During Seneca's lifetime his prime attacker was P. Suillius Rufus, former quaestor of Germanicus (Tac. *ann.* 4.31.3), who had been relegated under Tiberius for taking money in connection with a trial, then restored and elevated under Claudius, during whose reign he was closely associated with

show how representations of slavery become a way for the slave-owning class to think through their own subordination within the hierarchies of Roman society.

⁹⁸ Haley 2003: 3.

⁹⁹ Hopkins 1983, Garnsey and Saller 1987: 123, Scheidel 1999, and Habinek 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Attacks on Seneca are summarized in Tac. *ann.* 13.42.1–4. Seneca's own treatise, *De vita beata*, parries such attacks and thus provides indirect evidence of their nature and extent. For the sources and extent of Seneca's wealth, see Griffin 1976: 286–314. In denying that the treatise *De vita beata* responds to the attacks of Suillius, Griffin 1976: 19f. evinces needless skepticism. Seneca routinely used his writings to comment on contemporary affairs, e.g., *De clementia* following the murder of Britannicus, letter 47 on the execution of the *familia* of Pedanius Secundus, letter 73 on his own relationship to Nero.

Messalina (Tac. *ann.* 11.1.1–11.5.1). He himself was suffect consul in AD 43 or 45, and his son became consul ordinarius in AD 50.¹⁰¹ In a sense, Suillius's career anticipated that of Seneca by about half a generation: movement toward the center of power facilitated in part by maternal connections; success through rhetorical achievement; extended relegation followed by triumphant return; enrichment through willingness to work closely with those holding greater power; senatorial rank joined to influence within the imperial household, the latter attained at least in part through close association with an emperor's wife (Messalina for Suillius, Agrippina for Seneca); and success that carried over to other members of the family (e.g., Suillius's son, Seneca's brothers and nephew). Suillius's hostility to Seneca might thus be attributed to psychological causes (e.g., narcissism), court politics (associates of Messalina undone by associates of Agrippina), or social transition: one generation of upwardly mobile political neophytes resisting the next.

The last-mentioned motive has the broadest implications, for it allows us to see in the titanic struggle between Suillius and Seneca not just the supplanting of one generation of beneficiaries of the new order by another but also the crystallization of two conflicting tendencies in the Roman economy. Suillius, we are told, earned his fortune by accepting payment for representing others in legal cases.¹⁰² Seneca, on the other hand, grew wealthy at least in part through participation in the gift economy of the court.¹⁰³ During the period in question, the Roman elite found it difficult to make up its collective mind about the appropriateness of the Suillian method:

¹⁰¹ For evidence pertaining to the birth and career of Suillius, see Syme 1970: 27 f. The son is M. Suillius Nerullinus.

¹⁰² This is the gist of the situation described in Tac. *ann.* 11.5.1–3, where Suillius is said to have accepted 400,000 sesterces from a Roman knight named Samius, presumably to defend him, but then turns against him. The incident prompted the senators to ask for reinstatement of the Cincian Law of 204 BC, which forbade pleading for money. The Senate apparently succeeded in its request, at least in 54 AD, when, according to Tacitus, it was decreed that “no one should be bought by wage or gifts to plead a case” (Tac. *ann.* 13.5.1, trans. Woodman 2004: 247). In his final appearance in the *Annals*, Suillius as much as admits that he pleads for money: Tacitus calls him *venalis* (*ann.* 13.42.1), i.e., “for sale,” and he speaks of the modest fortune (*modicam pecuniam*) he has acquired through hard work (*labore*: Tac. *ann.* 13.42.4).

¹⁰³ We cannot be sure whether the wealth of the Annaei, prior to Seneca's elevation by Agrippina, derived from land, commerce, or both. Seneca describes himself and his brothers as *locupletes* (*dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*] 14.3), a term that is more likely to indicate that their wealth derived from landowning than other sources (see Levick 2003). But then wealth derived from land continued to hold a higher status under the Principate than wealth from commerce, so Seneca would be more likely to depict his family holding as being of the former sort.

first it restored, then ignored, then restored, then ignored republican-era legislation against accepting pay for legal representation.¹⁰⁴ The issue lay at the heart of the social system and of elite self-definition.

Was legal service a form of patronage (i.e., noblesse oblige) on the part of those who had influence and education, as it had been during the glory days of Cicero, Hortensius, and other late republican orators, or was it a useful skill to be compensated accordingly? Suillius, although older than Seneca, represents the newer, more “market-based” approach, while Seneca in effect reverts to a more traditional model. The paradox is that the Senecan approach to patronage and gift-giving, which he defends and discusses at length in his essay *On Benefits*,¹⁰⁵ seems to falsify the changing economic reality, that is the move to a more market-based system of exchange that characterizes the early Empire and prompts the economic growth that stabilizes the political system.¹⁰⁶ Suillius in effect represents the reality principle, Seneca the force of mystification, the former exposing, albeit unintentionally, the potential harshness of a system based upon payment for services, the latter patching over the contradictions between economic reality and cultural ideals. Tacitus, in particular, characterizes the struggle between Suillius and Seneca as a personal one, and modern historians have happily followed his lead. But here, as elsewhere in ancient historiography, the personal becomes a way of exploring social issues for which the ancients had no other conceptual language. Suillius's accusations against Seneca, it should be noted, comprised not just the charge of hypocrisy (i.e., the contradiction between a philosophy that preached detachment from wealth and the accumulation of a huge fortune), but also the claim that Seneca had acquired his wealth through no useful or productive activity. In Suillius's view, Seneca's “inert endeavors”

¹⁰⁴ The *lex Cincia*, banning payments to advocates, was passed in 204 BC and reaffirmed under Augustus in 17 BC. In AD 47 it was de facto inoperative, since the senators found themselves pressed to insist on its enforcement (*Tac. ann.* 11.5.2), only to be reinstated or reinforced in AD 54 (*Tac. ann.* 13.5.1). Yet in AD 58, despite Suillius's admission that he pleads for pay, Seneca and his allies rely on charges of provincial mismanagement and embezzlement of public funds in order to secure his relegation (*Tac. ann.* 13.43.1–5).

¹⁰⁵ Griffin 2003 makes much of the difference between patronage and gift exchange, arguing that the latter is the true topic of the work *De beneficiis*, but for our purposes the distinction is immaterial: both patronage and gift exchange are expressions of an embedded economy (i.e., one in which exchange is “embedded” in social structure) in contrast to the disembedded nature of a market economy. More suggestive on *De beneficiis* is Andrew 2004, who views it through the lens of Diderot's apologia for his own state of economic dependency on Catherine the Great. A classic instance of Seneca's resistance to markets can be found in *benef.* 3.15.1–4.

¹⁰⁶ In Haley's words (2003: 12), the early Roman Empire is best described as having a “subsidized market economy.”

(*studiis inertibus*: Tac. *ann.* 13.42.3; a deliberate oxymoron) contrast with his own labor (*labore*: *ann.* 13.42.4), effort (*adsequi*: *ann.* 13.42.3), endurance (*toleraturum*: *ann.* 13.42.4), and risk (*periculum*: *ann.* 12.42.4).

Cultural Authority

During Seneca's lifetime, the tension between old and new economic systems (or better, old and new aspects of one evolving system), and old and new methods of acquiring wealth, corresponds to a struggle between old and new ways of conceptualizing and organizing human endeavor more generally. For example, the question of pay for legal representation overlaps with that of the cultural authority of legal knowledge. As Aldo Schiavone has shown, perhaps the most famous legal case of the Neronian period—the debate over the collective punishment of a household of slaves for the murder of the master Pedanius Secundus—has implications not only for our understanding of Roman attitudes toward slavery (crucial as that is), but also for our conceptualization of the role of law and legal expertise in the Roman world.¹⁰⁷ As Tacitus relates the episode (*ann.* 14.42.1–45.2), although laws demanding collective punishment were still on the books, masses of the people and many of the senators were reluctant to see them enforced in this instance. But the old-style rigor of Cassius Longinus, whom Tacitus elsewhere describes as the pre-eminent jurist of the era (*ceteros praeeminebat peritia legum*: *ann.* 12.12.1), carries the day.

In Cassius's view, "every exemplary punishment contains an element of unfairness (*aliquid ex iniquo*), which, being directed against individuals, is outweighed by the public good in general (*utilitate publica rependitur*)."¹⁰⁸ Cassius is appealing not just to the *mos maiorum* but to the autonomy of the law and ultimately of those, such as himself, who specialize in it (*studium meum*: *ann.* 14.43.1). His argument is an intervention in the long-standing negotiation between jurists and emperors concerning the role of law and its relationship to imperial authority and in an equally long-standing dispute between adherence to the letter of the law and acceptance of a *ius aequitatis*, i.e., a tempering of the law through application of a basic sense of fair play.¹⁰⁹ Cassius's remarks, in particular his belittlement of *aequitas*, provide a context

¹⁰⁷ Schiavone 2003. Bradley 1994: 113 f. describes repeated Roman attempts to deal with the legal aftermath of assault or murder by slaves.

¹⁰⁸ Tac. *ann.* 14.44.1, my translation.

¹⁰⁹ Schiavone 2003, who traces the conflict in the writings of Cicero, Seneca, and the Roman jurists.

for Seneca's repeated appeals to *aequitas*, *misericordia*, *clementia*, and so on throughout his career. Seneca's preference for the spirit over the letter, attractive as it may seem to humanistically inclined readers, nonetheless positions him in opposition to those who would preserve the autonomy and distinctive power of legal discourse.

Seneca's reluctance to privilege the professional claims of jurisprudence is but one part of a much broader program of asserting the force of generalized over specialized discourse.¹¹⁰ The preference for the general is especially apparent in Seneca's approach to philosophy: his decision to write in Latin, as opposed to the Greek still preferred by "professionals"; his loyalty to the Roman sect of Fabianus and, before him, Sextius; his preference for Stoicism, the favorite philosophical viewpoint of the Roman elite, as opposed to more exclusivist movements;¹¹¹ and his (paradoxically) rigorous defense of the preceptive or hortatory aspect of philosophy and mode of philosophical writing.¹¹² While the contrast between the generalist and the specialist may appear to be merely a matter of intellectual or personal preference, in fact it has important social implications as well. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has gone so far as to argue that the disintegration of patriarchal and noble authority prompted by the rise of specialists (in law, religion, temporality, etc.) is characteristic of the fall of the Roman Republic, just as the attempt to reintegrate specialists into the imperial project—and often, quite specifically, into the imperial household—is critical to the development of the Principate.¹¹³ This tension between the centrifugal forces of specialization and the centripetal efforts of the emperors is still manifest in the later years of the Julio-Claudian dynasty: Seneca's recurrent attention to the issue is itself evidence of its continuing vitality. Once again, his actions and writings provide access to a different kind of truth than that sought by his biographers. Indeed, the central drama of his life, as transmitted through his writings and those of the other ancient sources, is the struggle between the pursuit of philosophy as an autonomous and self-transforming endeavor and the desire

¹¹⁰ For further discussion of this important topic, see Habinek 2000, esp. 284–292. The philosophical eclecticism with which Seneca is sometimes charged is but one manifestation of this much broader tendency.

¹¹¹ On Stoicism as the unifying discourse of the Roman elite during the late Republic and early Principate, see the excellent but neglected article of Shaw 1985.

¹¹² Especially Sen. *epist.* 94 and 95, as discussed by Habinek 1989: 238–254, Inwood 1995, and Habinek 2000: 289–292.

¹¹³ Wallace-Hadrill 1997. The social and political consequences of the rationalization of various activities previously controlled by *nobiles* is the topic of an important study by Moatti 1997.

to participate in the broader shaping of society. As I have argued elsewhere, that struggle resonates with successive generations of Romans who regard his life as “good to think with” about the tensions and priorities that shaped imperial society.¹¹⁴

Succession, Imagination, and the Future

A preference for generalizing discourse, whether philosophical or rhetorical, is part and parcel of a movement toward the center of power. Roman absolutism, like that of other times and places, sought to encompass specialized skills within its patronage and to orchestrate them to its benefit.¹¹⁵ Under Tiberius and Claudius, this effort took the form of reliance on freedmen, especially in the imperial household. Their specialized knowledge made them useful to the emperor; their antipathy toward the traditional aristocracy guaranteed their loyalty. The traditional aristocracy (or those who sought to inherit their privileges and positions) fought back by emphasizing aspects of cultural performance that were less accessible to those who had not been raised in the right circles. The contrast between the literary productivity and creativity of Seneca, his father, and his nephew, on the one hand, and the freedman Polybius's “dumbing down” of high culture on the other, in the form of prose paraphrases of Homer and Vergil, can be understood as one front in a wide-ranging social war.¹¹⁶ Seneca's preference for a gift economy and for *aequitas* as opposed to legal precision is part of the same struggle.

The conflict between specialized and generalizing skills, discourses, and the like overlaps with and reinforces two other constitutive contrasts of the early Empire: birth versus achievement, and orientation to the past versus orientation to the future.¹¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Seneca's life epitomizes these concerns as well. Birth is critical to all aspects of power in the Empire, as it had been under the aristocratic republic that preceded it. Seneca as much as anyone else assumes differences in outlook, worth, and so forth based on

¹¹⁴ Habinek 2000; cf. Ker 2006.

¹¹⁵ E.g., France under the absolute monarchy: see Mousnier 1979, vol. 1, ch. 10, “The Society of Corporations.”

¹¹⁶ On Polybius's literary activities, see Sen. *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*) 8.2 and 11.5. Seneca also seems to suggest that Polybius was intending to write fables (*dial.* 11.8.3)—a characteristic genre of slaves and freedmen, who acquired voice only through the imitation of inferior creatures: see Bloomer 1997b, Marchesi 2005, and Kurke 2006.

¹¹⁷ I have examined at length the conflict between birth and achievement as a structuring principle of Senecan philosophy in Habinek 1998: 137–150.

one's social and geographical status at birth. Yet his own rise to power made him the defining exemplum of the importance of achievement as opposed to birth.

When the poet Juvenal, writing some two generations after the death of Seneca wants to illustrate the principle that the low-born have contributed more to Rome's success than the nobility, he includes Seneca among the supporting examples, along with the republican general and consul Marius, who warded off barbarian invaders, and the "new man" Cicero, who defended the state from the conspiratorial activities of the higher-born Catiline.¹¹⁸ In his writings Seneca managed this contradiction through the advancement of an aristocracy of virtue: readers and writers such as himself who earned the benefits of high birth by re-creating themselves in a Stoic mode. The exhortation "begin to live" had, for Seneca and others, a social and political, as well as an ethical significance. Through the process of self-transformation, Seneca in effect acquired the right to speak to his fellow Romans as father to son, nobleman to commoner, and pointed the way for others to do likewise (his popularity in the generation after his death is just one indicator of the social role he came to fill).¹¹⁹

Setting oneself up as an exemplum implies an orientation to the future, a hope or even expectation that others will follow one's own path to glory. But the future is not the direction to which an aristocracy usually turns. The essence of a system that grants entitlement based on birth is that the past, not the future, authorizes one's status. This turn to the past, a measuring of anything and everything against the real or purported 'custom of the ancestors' (*mos maiorum*) is one of the defining features of republican Roman politics. Its importance had not yet been abandoned during the early Principate when Augustus in particular, but also Tiberius and even to some extent Claudius, justified their rule, their responses to crises, even their political and cultural innovations, by reference to the authority of the past.¹²⁰ So pervasive is this turn toward the past that one scholar (wrongly, in my view), has argued that all imperial politics are about preserving the status quo, rather than preparing for the future.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Iuv. sat. 8, especially verses 211f., on the theme *quid stemmata faciunt* ("what difference does genealogy make?"). For discussion, see Habinek 2000.

¹¹⁹ The theses of this and the following paragraphs are defended at much greater length in Habinek 1998: 137–150 and Habinek 2000.

¹²⁰ The Augustan slogan *res publica restituta* is the most obvious of such attempts to justify innovation through reference to the past.

¹²¹ Veyne 2003: 20.

Past and future pivot on the issue of succession. Under the Republic, as long as the *mos* with respect to elections, character of offices, and so on was upheld, one could expect a smooth transition of power from one generation to the next. But the Principate foundered and threatened to collapse precisely over the issue of transition of power. How was one to follow precedent when the whole enterprise was unprecedented? Thus the preparation of successors, the creation, in effect, of a past for the future, was a crucial, perhaps the crucial feature of the politics of the early Principate. Most of the bloodletting that makes Tacitus's account of the Julio-Claudian era such disturbing reading is symptomatic of chronic uncertainty over succession. Much of the positive effort of the more successful players of imperial politics also consists in the cultivation of reliable heirs: as Greg Rowe has shown, the grooming of princes is a key component of the new political culture of the early Principate.¹²²

In this matter, as in so many others, Seneca's life epitomizes the successes and failures of his era. Authorized—but only to a certain extent—by his Spanish equestrian origin, Seneca reaches the center of power never to look back at his provincial beginnings. Lack of “national feeling,” as it has been called, is a hallmark of Seneca's life and writings.¹²³ Recalled to Rome to educate the prince, Seneca flourishes precisely due to his mastery of the traditional skills of elite culture.¹²⁴ Arguing against economic innovation in favor of the traditional, aristocratic practice of gift exchange, he becomes an important investor—someone who looks not to the preservation of past goods but to the possibility of future growth and profit. Even at the moment of his death, Seneca turns simultaneously to the past and the future. Denied the opportunity to amend his will, he offers to his friends and family the “image of his life,” employing, at least in Tacitus's vocabulary, the traditional word for the death mask of a noble ancestor: *imago*.¹²⁵ Although a committed supporter of the imperial system, and, for a long time, of the particular regime of Nero, Seneca nonetheless invokes an age-old and essentially republican institution, one that entails the display and reanimation of the waxen images of generation upon generation of ancestors. To have created his own *imago* is an odd, albeit not unprecedented, achievement.¹²⁶ To hand it over to his

¹²² See Rowe 2002, who discusses more generally the transition to dynastic politics under the Julio-Claudians.

¹²³ Griffin 1976: 255 and Sørensen 1984.

¹²⁴ For further discussion, see Habinek 2000.

¹²⁵ Tac. *ann.* 15.62.1. On the social function of *imagines*, or death masks, in Rome, see Flower 1996, Habinek 2005a: 97 f., 122–132, 258 f., and Dufallo 2007.

¹²⁶ See the excellent discussion of Cicero's investment in his own *imago*: Dugan 2001. In

successors is to acknowledge the new authority of the future at the expense of the past. Unlike the newly dead aristocrat of republican times, whose funeral entails a speech of defense on his behalf before an audience of his reanimated ancestors, Seneca looks to the future for support and validation. In so doing he instantiates the final movement from republican to imperial politics, from Rome as city to Rome as universal Empire, from philosophy as study of dogma to philosophy as “art of living,”¹²⁷ from self as construct of the past to self as projection into the future. The *ratio* of such a life can only be grasped and articulated by a *societas* of present and future observers.

many respects, Cicero anticipates Seneca's reorientation of Roman culture from past to future and militaristic to humane, as Seneca was well aware.

¹²⁷ The phrase is that of Veyne 2003: viii.

THE WORKS OF SENECA THE YOUNGER AND THEIR DATES

C.W. Marshall

The works of L. Annaeus Seneca cannot be dated with any great precision. This is frustrating, since the interpretation and understanding of his immense and wide-ranging output would benefit from a precise chronological sequence. The works themselves resist any such systematization, however: Seneca makes very few references to his personal circumstances, which is appropriate considering his philosophical emphasis on the inner life, and this reticence has led one scholar to ask ironically, “Est-il possible de ‘dater’ un traité de Sénèque?”¹ Nevertheless, some headway is possible, and Giancotti (1957) on the *Dialogues*, Abel (1967) and Griffin (1976) on all the prose works, and Fitch (1981) and Nisbet (1995: 293–311) on the tragedies have made significant advances in understanding the dates of Seneca’s literary writings. This chapter seeks to integrate the conclusions of these studies. When something can be said in relation to a landmark event in Seneca’s life, it is often limited to *terminus ante* or *post quem*: his exile to Corsica following the accession of Claudius in AD 41 (Dio 60.8.5); his recall to serve as personal tutor to Nero in AD 49 (Tac. *ann.* 12.8.2); his rise to prominence on Nero’s accession in AD 54 (*ann.* 13.2.1); his diminished influence following the murder of Agrippina in AD 59 (*ann.* 14.14.2); and his withdrawal from all influence with Nero in AD 62 (*ann.* 14.52.1). Within the spans bounded by these points, a generally coherent picture emerges.

There are of course many methodological issues associated with assigning dates (both relative and absolute) to literary works. Internal references, stylistic features, external testimonia, and other factors may be employed to argue for a date, and different types of argument will carry different weights with different readers. Crucially, circularity must be avoided, and interpretations of a work cannot presume a date for which evidence does not exist. It may be possible to perceive a development in thought from one work to the next, but that in itself cannot be used as an argument for the relative dates of the works in question. There is also a danger with this sort of analysis in assuming a tendency toward the limits: a given work that shows

¹ Grimal 1949a, and see also Griffin 1976: 5 n. 2.

indications of being written before AD 54, for example, does not need to have been written close to AD 54; the limits identify boundaries, but in most cases do not establish more or less likely dates within the possible range. Indeed, the opposite is true: as one approaches the limit, there is a greater need for independent, unrelated points of reference. While any two arbitrary facts touching on an author's life may be close in time to one another (e.g., when a given work was written and an event recorded by Tacitus), it is improbable that such clusters will occur repeatedly, given how few data points survive. Agnosticism often remains the most prudent course. These issues are of course further confused if works are re-worked or re-edited following their initial circulation.² My hope here is not to overstate the case, but within each section to describe works in what may reasonably be thought to be chronological order, given the appropriate cautions offered below.

DIALOGUES

Ten treatises in twelve books, as found in the eleventh-century Ambrosian manuscript, are collectively known as DIALOGUES (*Dialogi*) and are numbered 1–12. The earliest of these, AD MARCIAM DE CONSOLATIONE (= *dial.* 6), probably dates to AD 39 or 40, although a later date into the 40s is possible.³ Seneca writes with authority to console Marcia, daughter of the historian A. Cremutius Cordus, on the death of her son Metilius three years earlier, and Seneca may have written works before this that are no longer extant. Reference to the republication of Cordus's works (*cons. Marc.* 1.3), which occurred under Gaius (Suet. *Cal.* 16.1), establishes a *terminus post quem*.⁴ Further, praise of Tiberius (as is found in *cons. Marc.* 3.2, 15.3) "would not have been prudent before 39" (Griffin 1976: 397, citing Dio 59.16.4 and Suet. *Cal.* 30.2). For the upper limit of the range, Abel argued that it must be before Seneca's exile, based on *in qua istud urbe, di boni, loquimur?* (*cons. Marc.* 16.2), which suggests both speaker and addressee are in Rome.⁵ This is not convincing: *loquimur* could equally be an epistolary conceit, whereby the letter creates the air of intimate communication, regardless of where the sender is; indeed, this effect would

² E.g., Schmidt 1961.

³ For previous discussions, see Giancotti 1957: 45–73, Abel 1967: 159 f., Griffin 1976: 397, and references there.

⁴ Bellemore's argument (1992) for an earlier, Tiberian date for the work requires rejecting Suetonius's evidence.

⁵ Abel 1967: 159 f., and references there.

be enhanced if Seneca were in exile. If this view is accepted, then Griffin's calculation of Marcia's age excludes only a date after AD 49 (1976: 397). While a Gaian date is perhaps reinforced by the absence of any mention of Gaius in the text, a date in the 40s remains possible, depending on the interpretation of *cons. Marc.* 16.2.

Two other *consolationes*, AD POLYBIUM DE CONSOLATIONE and AD HELVIAM MATREM DE CONSOLATIONE (= *dial.* 11 and 12), certainly belong to the period of Seneca's exile.⁶ The first, to Polybius, a freedman and secretary to Claudius *a studiis* (Suet. *Claud.* 28), offers consolation on the death of his brother. It was evidently written before Claudius's conquest of Britain in AD 43, which remains an anticipated event in *cons. Pol.* 13.2 *Britanniam aperiat* ("may [Claudius] open up Britain," though the verb could conceivably be used for a short while thereafter). The letter is an unsuccessful effort to win Seneca's recall. The date of his letter to his mother, offering her comfort on his own exile, cannot be circumscribed so precisely: Abel (1967: 163) took the ten months mentioned in *cons. Helv.* 16.1 literally; Griffin cautions against this, emphasizing instead the length of his absence, stressed in *cons. Helv.* 1.2 and 2.5. Neither of these need be determinative, however, and it is safer to accept a larger range, between AD 41 and 49.

The three books of the treatise DE IRA (= *dial.* 3–5) likely also belong to Seneca's exile.⁷ They are addressed to Seneca's older brother L. Annaeus Novatus, whose name was changed to L. Junius Gallio Annaeus (*PIR*² I 757), by AD 52 at the latest, perhaps due to a testamentary adoption.⁸ References to Gaius make it clear that he is dead (*de ira* 1.20.8, 2.33.3–4, 3.18.3–4), but the force of *modo* ("recently": 3.18.3) to describe an action of Gaius cannot be pressed unduly, as Seneca himself noted in *epist.* 49.4. It is not necessary to follow Coccia and Abel in asserting that the work must be confined to the period following Gaius's death and before Seneca's exile; any time between 41 and, at the latest, early AD 52 is possible.

Griffin argues forcefully for a date of AD 55 for DE BREVITATE VITAE (= *dial.* 10), although she insists on nothing more specific than a date between AD

⁶ For previous discussions, see Giancotti 1957: 74–92, Abel 1967: 163 f., Griffin 1976: 397 f., and references there.

⁷ For previous discussions, see Giancotti 1957: 93–150, Abel 1967: 159, Griffin 1976: 398, and references there.

⁸ Griffin 1976: 48, n. 2. The so-called "Gallio inscription" (see Plassart 1967, Oliver 1971, and Hemer 1980), found at Delphi, provides the lynchpin for dating the New Testament (cf. Acts 18.12–17), and was written in the first half of AD 52, and it shows that he was at that time proconsul of Achaia and was using the name Gallio. Since the proconsulship would have begun in AD 51, it is likely that the adoption occurred before this.

mid-48 and mid-55.⁹ This was the period during which the work's addressee, Pompeius Paulinus, Seneca's father-in-law (see *ann.* 15.60.4), was *praefectus annonae*. *Brev.* 18f. urge Paulinus to retire from his administrative duties managing Rome's grain supply to more important things (*maiora: brev.* 18.2). In this period at least some of Seneca's tragedies are likely to have been composed (see below), a fact that bears on the interpretation of the life Seneca recommends.

DE VITA BEATA (= *dial.* 7) is dedicated to Seneca's brother, to whom *De Ira* had also been dedicated, after he had been adopted by Gallio and had taken his name.¹⁰ The Gallio inscription (see n. 8) attests his name in AD 52, so the adoption must have taken place before this. *Vit. beat.* was written after the adoption, but conceivably still written before AD 52. While Gallio did not die until AD 66, the subject matter, in which Seneca justifies his great wealth and prosperity, strongly suggests a Neronian date before AD 62. It does not follow, however, that the work was composed as a direct response to the attacks in AD 58 by P. Suillius Rufus (*ann.* 13.42.1–43.5), as Griffin argues (1976: 19 f. and 306–309).

Two, perhaps three works were dedicated to Annaeus Serenus, who died as a prefect of the nightwatch (Plin. *nat.* 22.96) sometime before AD 64, when it is probable Seneca wrote *epist.* 63.14 (and perhaps before the beginning of AD 62, when Tigellinus became *praefectus vigilum*).¹¹ The first of these, DE CONSTANTIA SAPIENTIS (= *dial.* 2), seems to have been written after the death of Valerius Asiaticus in AD 47 (*ann.* 11.3.2), given the reference to him in *const.* 18.2. DE TRANQUILLITATE ANIMI (= *dial.* 9), in which Serenus is a Stoic (*tranq.* 1.10), is later than *const.*, in which he is still an Epicurean (15.4; the sequence of Serenus's philosophical development is secured by *const.* 3.2, and see Griffin 1976: 316). The fragmentary DE OTIO (= *dial.* 8) is also addressed to a Stoic, and there is reason to believe this too is Serenus, although this is conjectural. If so, it also postdates *const.*, but the relative position between it and *tranq.* cannot be determined.¹² Many have believed *De Otio* to be the last of the three, but Seneca's "shifting positions [...] may well be more experimental

⁹ For previous discussions, see Giancotti 1957: 363–445, Abel 1967: 162 f., Griffin 1962 and 1976: 398 and 401–407, and references there.

¹⁰ For previous discussions, see Giancotti 1957: 310–362, Abel 1967: 160–162, Griffin 1976: 399, and references there.

¹¹ Griffin 1976: 447 f. and Giancotti 1957: 153–157. See also Giancotti 1957: 151–177, Abel 1967: 159 and 162, Griffin 1976: 316 f. and 399, and references there for the relationship between the three works. For *const.*, see also Giancotti 1957: 178–192; for *tranq.*, see also Giancotti 1957: 193–224; for *de otio*, see also Giancotti 1957: 225–243 and Williams 2003: 12–16.

¹² Griffin 1976: 316 f.

than a 'sincere' reflection of his own beliefs on either or both occasions" (Williams 2003: 16). All three works were then composed between AD 47 and (probably) AD 62, with *const.* being composed first.

There is no solid basis for establishing the date of *DE PROVIDENTIA* (= *dial.* 1), a work dedicated to Lucilius, who is also the dedicatee of works composed in the 60s, except to say that it was written after the death of Gaius (see *prov.* 4.4).¹³ Abel placed it securely in AD 64 because the work presents Lucilius as an avowed Stoic, but the literary nature of this (or any) philosophical work makes such an inference untenable. Tying the work to the period of the *Letters* (*Epistulae*) however, is not unreasonable, even if it cannot be proved.

TRAGEDY, VERSE, AND SATIRE

Of the more than seventy EPIGRAMS that have been ascribed to Seneca, none can be dated securely. The *Anthologia Latina* ascribes only three to him explicitly (*Anth. Lat.* 232, 236, 237), the last two of which concern exile on Corsica. This, I suggest, undermines the attribution rather than reinforces it: Seneca was Corsica's most famous refugee, and the subject is a likely one for someone appropriating Seneca's voice. The reference to Seneca's poetry as a model for the *versiculi* of Pliny (*epist.* 5.3.2–5) is not a statement about the genre Seneca employed, as other names in the list demonstrate.¹⁴ Nevertheless, if any epigrams are authentic, some may date to the period of his exile.

It is to this period that one may also place the first group of Seneca's tragedies, *AGAMEMNON*, *PHAEDRA*, and *OEDIPUS*. Eight authentic tragedies exist,¹⁵ and the echoes of *Hercules Furens* in *Apocolocyntosis* (see n. 20), if valid, set a *terminus ante quem* for that play of AD 54. The earliest certain reference to Seneca's tragedies is Quintilian, *inst.* 8.3.31, in which Quintilian recalls an exchange between Pomponius Secundus and Seneca about a tragedy in his youth (*iuvenis admodum*) that must date soon after the return

¹³ For previous discussions, see Giancotti 1957: 244–309, Abel 1967: 158, Griffin 1976: 400 f., and references there.

¹⁴ Note also that Pliny is not certain that Seneca's poetry was recited, at least by the author: *recito tamen, quod illi an fecerint nescio* (*epist.* 5.3.7, "But I recite [my verses], though I do not know whether they [my predecessors] did").

¹⁵ Despite attempts of its revival (Kohn 2003), the idea that the plays are not by L. Annaeus Seneca has not won general approval. Quintilian, *inst.* 9.2.8, quotes *Medea* 453 and attributes it to Seneca, but that single reference is sufficient for the attribution. Two other plays in the manuscripts are spurious and post-Neronian. They are discussed at the end of this section.

of Pomponius to Rome at the end of AD 51: this suggests a public presentation of a play in some form in the early 50s, but says nothing about this being the time of composition.¹⁶ Stylistic features discussed by Fitch (1981), particularly the increased incidence of sense-pause mid-line in the iambic verses (which he demonstrates is also a useful diagnostic for Sophocles and Shakespeare, but not for Euripides) and the increased incidence of shortened final -o, identify three clear chronological groupings for the plays. Fitch reckons the percentage of sense-pauses that occur within the line as measured against the total number of sense-pauses within an iambic section: *Agamemnon* (32.4%), *Phaedra* (34.4%), and *Oedipus* (36.8%) form a coherent group, but contextual variation should create a margin of error that does not place the works within this group in a certain order. The play with the next smallest ratio, *Medea* (47.2%), clearly belongs to a different cluster. The plays in this group predate *Hercules Furens* (which belongs to the middle group) and therefore all were also composed before AD 54.¹⁷ The nature of the evidence does not allow any conclusion more precise than this: the three plays were composed (in whatever order) in a cluster, but no certain sequence can be determined. A Claudian date seems reasonably certain for these first three plays, but they could conceivably date to the exile, or before (into the reigns of Gaius or even Tiberius), or after.¹⁸

This metrical approach is to be preferred to those who seek covert anti-Neronian messages in the tragedies, placing some or all in the 60s (e.g., Bishop 1985). Töchterle (1994: 44–48 and *infra*, p. 483) believes verbal parallels, particularly with *nat.*, point to a composition date for *Oedipus* between AD 62 and 65. The implications are significant: in addition to vitiating Fitch's conclusions, the date would point to a particular political purpose for the tragedies, whereby, in this case, Nero, Claudius, and Agrippina are to be mapped onto Oedipus, Laius, and Jocasta. Accounts of Jocasta's death (*hunc pete | uterum capacem: Oed.* 1038f., *hunc petite uentrem: Pho.* 447) and Agrippina's death as presented in post-Neronian sources (*Oct.* 368–372; *uentrem feri: Tac. ann.* 14.8.4) would therefore allude to Agrippina's death in AD 59. It is easier, if less scandalous, to believe that Tacitus and the author of *Oct.* “saw in Seneca's presentation of Jocasta [in *Oed.*] a suitable model for their account of Nero's mother, one which carried implications of incest and

¹⁶ See Tarrant 1985: 12 and Fitch 1987a: 50f., and references there.

¹⁷ This date suggests that the apparent allusions to *Ag.* 330–341 in *Einsiedeln Eclogue* 1.22–33 are real and not incidental; see Tarrant 1985: 11.

¹⁸ Coffey 1957: 150 adopts this agnostic position, followed by Tarrant 1976: 6f.

moral perversion at the heart of the late Julio-Claudian court" (Boyle 1997: 102). This process may have begun with Seneca himself, when writing *Phoen.* (see *infra*, p. 40).

The second group of tragedies, *TROADES*, *MEDEA*, and *HERCULES FURENS*, possibly centers around AD 54, but again it need not, and all three could well predate this. As with the first group of plays, incidences of sense-pause within a line strongly suggests they were composed within a short time of one another: *Medea* (47.2%), *Troades* (47.6%), and *Hercules Furens* (49.0%). As with the first group, a reasonable margin of error does not allow for the order of works within this cluster to be established. Nisbet argues that *Med.*, which likely alludes to Claudius's invasion of Britain in AD 43, is unlikely to have been composed after Claudius's death, and suggests that AD 51 to 52, when Gallio was proconsul in Corinth, "would be quite a good moment for Seneca's Corinthian play" (1995: 295). This is appealing, but hardly certain. Verbal echoes have been detected between *Herc. f.* and *apocol.*, and the gratuitous nature of the tragic Hercules in *apocol.* argues that the tragedy is the earlier work.¹⁹ Fitch believes "the tragedy was fresh in his mind and had either been written, or at any rate presented in *recitatio*, within a year or two of 54" (1987: 53), and this certainly could be the case. That would also mean that *De Ira* had probably been composed by the time Seneca began working on these plays, and this has some bearing on the interpretation of these works. Strictly speaking, however, though the relative position of *Herc. f.* and *apocol.* seems probable, there is nothing to require composition near this date, and it is conceivable that all the plays in these first two groups come from a period much earlier in Seneca's career. The *APOCOLOCYNTHOSIS*, a prosimetric Menippean satire on the death of Claudius, almost certainly dates to November or December of AD 54: Eden accepts Furneaux's hypothesis that it was produced for the Saturnalia, which began on December 17, at which Nero was *rex* (*ann.* 13.15.2).²⁰ This would also establish some time between the more traditional encomium for Claudius's funeral that Seneca wrote (*ann.* 13.3.1), to which it would have been compared in any case at the time. At least one play in this middle cluster (*Herc. f.*) predates *apocol.*, and possibly all three do.

A number of factors suggest instead that Seneca returned to the tragic form late in his career, and that the last two plays (the third group) are to be

¹⁹ See Mesk 1912, Weinreich 1923, and Fitch 1987a: 51–53.

²⁰ Eden 1984: 4 f., esp. 5 n. 11. See also Griffin 1976: 129 n. 3. Tacitus surprisingly accepts that the position of *rex* fell to Nero by lot.

dated to the 60s, even though, strictly speaking, only their position relative to the second group is established. *THYESTES* exhibits another jump in its use of mid-line sense-pause (54.5%) and a significant increase in the use of a shortened final *-o* (Fitch 1981: 303–305). Tacitus, *ann.* 14.52.3, describes how, before AD 62, Seneca's poetic output (*carmina*) had increased once Nero had taken a liking to it. While *carmina* may refer to epigrams and other poetic forms, it could equally refer to a return to tragedy (see Tarrant 1985: 12 f.), and Tarrant uses this comment to give an approximate range for the play of AD 60–62. Nisbet denies this—it is “a false clue” (1995: 296)—but nevertheless sees in *Thyestes* a series of historical allusions that put its composition at AD 62 (1995: 300–309). Given that Seneca's retirement may have been a gradual process (cf. *ann.* 14.53.1–57.2), distinguishing between these positions is difficult, and any date close to AD 62 remains possible.

Perhaps the most distinctive result of Fitch's metrical analyses is the confluence of two measures in determining a late date for *PHOENISSAE*. The play has the highest incidence of sense-pause within a line (57.2%), and, by some margin, the highest incidence of shortened final *-o*. Both of these strongly indicate *Phoenissae* was the last tragedy Seneca composed, a conclusion corroborated by its apparent incompleteness. If the argument for ascribing *Thyestes* to ca. AD 62 is accepted, then *Phoenissae* would date to the final years of Seneca's life, as Seneca chose a mythical subject that attracted both Euripides and Sophocles in the final years of their lives (Nisbet 1995: 309). This has bearing on the date of *HERCULES OETAeus*, a play included among the Senecan tragedies alongside the certainly spurious *Octavia*. The play has been defended as authentic by Rozelaar (1985) and Nisbet (1995: 209–212), who treat it as a late play, composed “shortly before Seneca's death in 65; that would explain the anomalies, the verbosity, the other signs of haste” (Nisbet 1995: 210). Several indications tell against this. The incidence of shortened final *-o* is very small, as Nisbet admits (1995: 310), and the verbose nature of *Oetaeus*, and its sheer length, suggest a fundamentally different approach to playwriting than that suggested by *Phoenissae*: both are unlikely to have developed from the same author composing at the same time in his life. *Hercules Oetaeus* is therefore not by Seneca,²¹ and may date as late as the early second century, as suggested by Zwierlein (1986b: 313–343).

Three dates have been argued for the inauthentic *OCTAVIA*: several scholars have argued for a date in AD 68 and the reign of Galba;²² Ferri cites

²¹ See Leo 1878: vol. 1, 48–74, Friedrich 1954, and Axelson 1967.

²² Kragelund 1982: 38–52 and 1988, Barnes 1982, and Wiseman 2001: 10 and 14.

parallels between the play and certain poems of Statius, which, if the directionality of the reference is correct, would argue for a date in the 90s (2003: 5–30). The early years of Vespasian's reign (AD 69 to the mid-70s) is also possible (Junge 1999: 199 f., Smith 2003: 426–430, and Boyle 2008: xiii–xvi).²³

LONGER PROSE WORKS

There are four longer prose works that survive, all of which are Neronian and date to the last decade of Seneca's life. The first, *DE CLEMENTIA*, is dated to Nero's nineteenth year (*clem.* 1.9.1–2), i.e., sometime between December 15, AD 55 and December 14, AD 56, and is dedicated to the new princeps.²⁴ Originally in three books, only the first and part of the second survive. Seneca had composed Nero's speech at Claudius's funeral (*ann.* 13.3.1–2), as well as other speeches critical to securing his authority (Dio 61.3.1), and early in AD 55 he wrote several speeches for Nero that had the princeps *clementiam suam obstrigens* (*ann.* 13.11.2, “pledging himself to compassion”)—the less respectful *apocol.* having been composed at exactly this time. It was early in AD 55, of course, that Britannicus was murdered (*ann.* 13.15.1–17.3), which makes the historical situation of *clem.* roughly one year later all the more interesting for an understanding of Seneca's purpose.²⁵ *Clem.* is an overtly political work, and probably represents a consolidation of the ideas adumbrated in these speeches, a coherent policy statement for the new regime.

The seven books of *DE BENEFICIIS* are dedicated to Aebutius Liberalis, who is the subject of *epist.* 91 (from book 14, about which see below). The work was written between AD 56 and AD 64 (Griffin 1976: 399). Seneca returned to the subject of favors and ingratitude in *epist.* 81 (from book 10): *epist.* 81.3 makes clear that *benef.* predates the letter. As with any multivolume work, composition over time must be considered. In this case, books 1–4 appear to form a cohesive unit, and *benef.* 5.1.1 begins with an acknowledgment that the remaining books are of a different character. While they have the same

²³ Tanner 1985 offers a radically different division of the plays based primarily on his perceptions of the performance demands. He suggests that *Thyestes*, *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus*, and *Phaedra* (and *Phoenissae* if produced as it survives) were composed by Seneca during his exile from AD 41–49, and that the remaining plays (*Octavia*, *Troades*, *Hercules Furens*, and *Hercules Oetaeus*) are not by Seneca and were composed between AD 70 and 80. Dingel 2009 appeared as this volume was due to go to press, and could not be taken into account.

²⁴ Griffin 1976: 407–411.

²⁵ See Griffin 1976: 134–139 for a discussion of this tension.

addressee, there is no reason they could not have been composed after the space of several years, even following the composition of *epist.* 81.

Indeed, several works may be ascribed to the period following Seneca's retirement in AD 62, which was a particularly prolific period: we have seen that *De Otio* and *De Providentia* might belong to this period, as might *Thyestes* and some or all of *De Beneficiis*. Almost certainly *Phoenissae* comes from these final years, as do *Naturales Quaestiones* and the *Letters to Lucilius* (*Epistulae*). Hine (2006: 71) provides a conservative back-of-the-envelope calculation, suggesting a rate of composition during this period of (at least) one book every forty days, even suggesting that this was "a very modest rate of composition compared to what Cicero achieved at the end of his life" (71, note 124), who achieved an average of about one book every twenty-four days. There are reasons to believe that Seneca was in fact composing faster than this, which demonstrates that much of this final period was dedicated to literary endeavors.

The text of *NATURALES QUAESTIONES* is corrupt, but the work may originally have had eight books addressing various natural phenomena: seven books survive, with a clear break evident in book 4.²⁶ The date of the work is established by reference to specific natural phenomena within it. Mention is made of an earthquake in Greece that preceded an earthquake in Pompeii by one year (*nat.* 6.1.13). Tacitus (*ann.* 15.22.2) dates the Italian earthquake to AD 62, which is close to the date of AD 63 suggested by Seneca (*nat.* 6.1.2).²⁷ This could provide a context for the mention of earthquakes in Greece following the appearance of a comet (*nat.* 7.28.3), which would therefore refer to a comet that was visible from August to December of AD 60 (Ramsey 2006: 140–146). Similarly, when Seneca says "two such [comets] have been seen in our lifetime" (*quales duo aetate nostra visi sunt: nat.* 7.6.1), it seems certain he is referring to this comet and Claudius's comet, visible for a month in AD 54 (Ramsey 2006: 136–140). This passage, therefore, was not revised after the appearance of another comet, in May of AD 64.²⁸ These details combine to suggest that *nat.* was completed sometime between AD 61 and early 64. Seneca

²⁶ Hine 1996: xxiv argues that the original order was 3, 4a, 4b, 5, 6, 7, 1, 2.

²⁷ Hine 1996 assumes *nat.* 6.1.2 *Regulo et Virginio consulibus* to be a gloss from Tacitus. See also Wallace-Hadrill 2003: 182, who argues for a date of late AD 61 for the Greek earthquake, and Hine 2006: 68–72, who summarizes the issue and emphasizes that there is no reason to doubt the Tacitean text.

²⁸ The language of the sources (*sidus cometes: Tac. ann.* 15.47.1; *stella crinita: Suet. Nero* 36.1) shows that this object was thought to be a comet, even though it may have been a nova. See Ramsey 2006: 146–148.

may have begun it earlier, and some relationship doubtless exists between passages here and several lost works, including *De Situ et Sacris Aegyptiorum* (T 19 Vottero), *De Situ Indiae* (T 20–21 Vottero), *De Motu Terrarum* (T 55 Vottero), and *De Forma Mundi* (T 56 Vottero). *Nat.* is dedicated to Lucilius Junior (*PIR*² L 388), as was *prov.* Lucilius was a slightly younger contemporary of Seneca (he is *in senectute* in *epist.* 19.1, and see 96.3), who in the early 60s attained a procuratorship in Sicily.

Lucilius is also the recipient of the collection of Stoic letters, *EPISTULAE*, which survive as 124 letters divided into twenty books, although Aulus Gellius 12.2.3 refers to a non-extant letter in book 22, which shows that the surviving collection is incomplete and that its precise original size cannot be determined. The book format is important for interpreting the letters, although modern editions typically obscure this aspect (Wilson 2001). Several letters mention real events, and while some historical details may be included to create a sense of dramatic moment, isolating the dramatic date for the letter from the actual time it was composed in the tradition of Athenian philosophical texts is problematic. Many details refer to comparatively personal issues in the lives of Seneca and Lucilius that cannot serve this function for a broader readership: a lawsuit, a new book by Lucilius, personal illness, retirement, and so on. These are of a different order than the reference to the fire at Lugdunum (Lyons) in *epist.* 91 (dated to July 64 by Tacitus, *ann.* 16.13.3), for example, which could more easily be used to establish a dramatic date, if that were Seneca's intention. Nevertheless, the rate of composition suggested by the letters clearly points to an inherent artificiality in the nature of the correspondence between the two, indicating "not only that he failed to wait for a reply before writing (as he does in 118.1 as a concession), but that he sometimes sent letters, not individually, but in packets" (Griffin 1976: 418). Seneca knew he was writing for publication (*epist.* 21.5), and it is likely that there was some editorial work introduced either by him or by someone else soon after his death, which means that any apparent allusion to real events may serve multiple unrecoverable purposes. References to the passing of seasons do coincide with a relatively tight sequence for the letters between the autumn of 63 and Seneca's death in April 65 (Griffin 1976: 347–353 and 400), with some books appearing for the public "perhaps in the latter part of 64" (Griffin 1976: 349). From this Griffin concludes that Lucilius's spiritual development, described in the letters, must be fictional, although this cannot be taken as certain.

There are, of course, other works of Seneca that no longer survive. Martial 7.45 implies that there was a collection of letters sent to Caesonius (or Caesennius) Maximus, a friend who had accompanied Seneca during his exile

(see also 7.44). There are no means by which to date the lost *De Matrimonio* (T 22–F 54 Vottero), *De Superstitione* (T 64–F 75 Vottero), or the life of his father (*De Vita Patris*, F 97 Vottero). In his account of Seneca's suicide, Dio (62.25.2) has him revising a book and leaving it, and others, with his friends. It is not known which works these are. Tacitus, too, emphasizes that Seneca was composing to the very end, even though he had cut himself repeatedly to increase the flow of blood: *et novissimo quoque momento suppeditante eloquentia advocatis scriptoribus pleraque tradidit*—"and, even at the very last moment, his eloquence in full supply, he called his scribes and dictated a great many things" (*ann.* 15.63.3).

TRANSMISSION

Rolando Ferri

Quintilian states, in his catalogue of Seneca's works in *inst.* 10.1.125–131, that he treated all fields of study. He lists *orationes*, *poemata*, *epistulae*, and *dialogi*, probably omitting the scientific works as irrelevant for an appreciation of Seneca's *eloquentia*.¹ Virtually nothing survives of Seneca's activity as an orator (*Testimonia* 2–13 Vottero), but the other three genres are well represented among his extant writings. Yet it is estimated that about half of Seneca's literary output may have perished.

After his lifetime, Seneca's fortune seems to have undergone a period of bad press, mainly at the hands of the “archaizing” writers, who disapproved of his “modernist” style, the banality or plainness of his lexicon, and his censure of the early writers, as witnessed by Gellius (12.2.1).² Seneca's works, however, remained in some fashion, as shown by the fourth-century forged correspondence with St. Paul: even the comparatively illiterate Faustus, the Manichaeian master, made a point of knowing his Seneca (*Aug. conf.* 5.6).

Seneca never entered the canon of “core” school authors: lexicographers and grammarians hardly ever quote from the prose works³ and his name is absent from the list of school readings in *Hermeneumata Celtis*, ll. 38 f. Dionisotti.⁴ Priscianus, alarmingly, even mistook the Elder for the Philosopher.⁵ However, quotes from the tragedies are more frequent in works by grammarians, commentators, and Christian authors—a fact that may suggest inclusion in some advanced school syllabi at least.⁶

¹ In addition to *nat.*, Pliny and Servius record a *De situ et sacris Aegyptiorum* (T 19 Vottero), and a *De situ Indiae* (T 20 f. Vottero). Cassiodorus owned a copy of *De forma mundi* (T 56 Vottero), and Seneca himself refers to his *De motu terrarum* in *nat.* 6.4.2.

² Trillitzsch 1971: 69–75 Holford-Strevens 2003: 276 f.

³ Except Diomedes, who refers to the “dialogue” *De superstitione*, *GLK* 1.379.17, and to *De officiis*, *GLK* 1.366.11.

⁴ Dionisotti 1982: 100.

⁵ Vottero 1998: 15 f.

⁶ E.g., Diom. *GLK* 1.511.23 [*Med.* 301]; Ps.-Probus, *De ultimis syll.* *GLK* 4.224.20 [*Hecuba* = *Tro.* 861]; and Prisc. *inst.* *GLK* 2.253.7 [*Phaedr.* 710 and *Ag.* 365]. Christian authors mentioning or imitating the tragedies include Augustin, Jerome, and Ennodius (cf. Trillitzsch 1971: 379, 386). Ennodius, in particular, in *Libellus pro synodo* 38, presents a quote from *Medea* as a recollection from his juvenile readings.

On the other hand, Christian writers concentrate, predictably, on the treatises that are more compatible with Christian doctrine and morals, above all on the protreptic *Exhortationes* (F 76–89 Vottero), on *De superstitione* (F 65–75 Vottero), and on *De matrimonio* (F 23–54 Vottero). Unfortunately, echoes from extant prose works are rare and do not enable us to identify strands of textual tradition in antiquity different from what we have in the medieval period.⁷

Three late-antique fragments containing Senecan works have come down to us. A palimpsest codex of Biblical content, the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Pal. Lat.* 24, was put together perhaps in the seventh century from leaves taken from ancient books by different classical authors. The lower script of six of these, dated by E.A. Lowe to the third or fourth century,⁸ preserves barely legible fragments of the otherwise unknown *Quomodo amicitia continenda sit* and the initial words of *De vita patris* (F 58–60 and F 97 Vottero). Just before the second fragment, a tantalizing scribal subscription by one Nicianus, not otherwise known or identifiable, yields proof of some editorial activity on Seneca.

A fragment of the tragedy *Medea* has recently been published: it belonged to a small (120 × 180 mm, the size of an OCT), early vellum codex, perhaps from the fourth century (*P. Mich. inv. n.* 4969).⁹ Also late-antique and re-used is *Ambrosianus G. 82 sup.* (= *R* in modern editions), five leaves of which, in a fifth-century *capitalis rustica*, transmit in the lower script passages from *Medea* and *Oedipus*. Both late-antique MSS, however, are difficult to relate to the two known branches of the tradition of the tragedies, *E* and *A* (see *infra*).¹⁰

Among the last important instances of Seneca's *Nachleben* at the end of antiquity are Martinus Bracaraensis's imitations and excerpts from Seneca in the sixth century (most notably his *De ira*, and the *Formula vitae honestae*, perhaps an abridgement of the lost *De officiis*).¹¹ The last to quote the *Ad Lucilium* was Gregorius Magnus, in a letter written in AD 591 (*MGH Epistulae*

⁷ Tertullian, *De anima* 20 has a verbal quote from *benef.* (4.6.6), with only minimal differences, which might be simply memory slips (omnium aetatum, omnium artium semina] o. artium et aetatum s. *Tert.*). The passage of *De ira* quoted by Lactantius, *De ira Dei* 17.13 (= *Sen. dial.* 3.2.3b Reynolds) comes from the initial lacuna of *A* (see *infra*).

⁸ Lowe 1964: 106.

⁹ Publication in Markus and Schwendner 1997.

¹⁰ Zwierlein 2004: I 263–266.

¹¹ Trillitzsch 1971: 211–221, which also mentions other sententious collections of dubious authenticity.

1, p. 47).¹² After that, for a space of two centuries (7th–8th cent.), no evidence survives indicating either knowledge or copying of Seneca's works.

The earliest surviving medieval MS of a Senecan text is also the archetype of the tradition of both *De beneficiis* and *De clementia*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Pal. Lat.* 1547, identified by the siglum *N*, for *Nazarianus*, with reference to the *Monasterium Sancti Nazarii* of Lorsch, where the MS was hosted until the fifteenth century before being moved to Heidelberg and then, after the Catholic capture of the city in 1622, to Rome. *N* has been the subject of extensive study and has been shown to originate from Northern Italy, perhaps Milan, where it was copied around the year 800. A copy of *N*, *R* (BAV, *Reginensis Latinus* 1529), appearing not much later than the parent MS, was soon moved north to France and was the origin of all subsequent tradition.¹³ Several layers of correction are identifiable in *N*, perhaps when the MS was being prepared for copying. Winterbottom 2001 has suggested that not all corrections of *R* on *N* may have been the result of conjecture.

Not much later than *Nazarianus* are the earliest extant MSS of the *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, from the beginning of the ninth century. The ninth century is when indirect evidence of knowledge of the letters also reappears.¹⁴ The tradition, initially, is divided, and two different groups of MSS transmit letters 1–88 and 89–124.¹⁵ Reynolds has argued that the divide goes back to an ancient dispersal of the *Letters* over several codices, certainly two, but possibly three, because in some MSS letters 1–52 also seem to form a separate codicological unit. In addition, the fact that Gellius 12.2 quotes a passage from book 22 (our MSS reach only book 20) suggests that there was at least another ancient 'tome' of Seneca's letters to Lucilius and that it did not survive antiquity. Reynolds has located the spheres of influence for the two groups in France (1–88) and Southern Germany (89–124). The earliest MS in which the two groups are joined is *Q*, Brescia, Biblioteca Pubblica Quiriniana B.II.6.

¹² *Ut tibi aliquid saecularis auctoris loquar: cum amicis omnia tractanda sunt, sed prius de ipsis* (= Sen. *epist.* 3.2, *tu vero omnia cum amico delibera, sed de ipso prius*).

¹³ The fullest account of the tradition of *De clementia* is in Malaspina 2001a, who has also championed the thesis that one of the *recentiores*, *Q*, can claim direct descent from *N*. For *De beneficiis* the most recent edition is that of Préchac 1926.

¹⁴ Walafridus Strabo transcribed letter 120 in a miscellaneous MS, *Sangallensis* 878, f. 348^r, ca. 809, and Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie quotes *epist.* 10.2 in *De fide spe et caritate*, ca. 846, *PL* 120.1442.

¹⁵ According to Reynolds 1965a: 56–65, the latter group derives from a late-antique uncial MS from the fifth or sixth century.

The *Naturales Quaestiones* survive in about 100 manuscripts, all of fairly recent date. At the end of antiquity, the work was known to Ammianus Marcellinus¹⁶ and a brief Greek paraphrase survives in the work *De mensibus* by Iohannes Laurentius Lydus, a Constantinopolitan historian and antiquarian. Lydus's paraphrasis is particularly important because he was using a codex more complete than the archetype of our tradition. The earliest MSS of *nat.* are not older than the twelfth century, with the single exception of a ninth-century florilegium written in Brittany or in the Loire region (Y, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, *Clm 18961-II*). The most recent editor of the work, H. Hine, followed by Parroni 2002, has divided the MSS in three families, YΨΥ, but M.D. Reeve has queried the solidity of Ψ, which is weakly defined by errors that were easy to correct and that may therefore have been corrected in the other branches independently.¹⁷ The order of the books differs greatly in the MSS: that of the archetype is reconstructed by Hine to have been III–X, suggesting a loss of two initial books. A great lacuna has also occurred at the archetype level in Book IV, *De Nilo*, and, following Haase, editors use the sigla 4a and 4b for the two remaining fragments.¹⁸

We owe to the library at Montecassino the survival of the twelve so-called *Dialogi*. The identification of the eleventh-century *Ambrosianus C 90 inf.* (A) with the “Seneca” made to copy in Montecassino by Abbot Desiderius in a notice going back to 1058–1087 (*Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, MGH SS 34, III.63, p. 446 Hoffmann) has not been challenged and A appears to be the archetype of the majority of the MSS of the twelve dialogues.¹⁹ Thereafter, knowledge of the *Dialogi* spread slowly north and copies multiplied. A may have been transcribed from a very early MS: some indication that its exemplar was perhaps a late-antique book is the lay out of the list of contents on 3^r. The *recentiores* have been divided by the most authoritative editor, L.D. Reynolds, into two classes. One, β, descends in toto from A and becomes useful only where A is illegible or has subsequently suffered textual loss after being copied. A second, less numerous, class of *recentiores*, γ, appears to descend not from A but from a twin, possibly also of Montecassino origin.²⁰

¹⁶ Gercke 1895: 99–103.

¹⁷ Reeve 2000: 202.

¹⁸ Lydus's Greek paraphrase of a portion of the text from the medieval lacuna is reproduced by Hine on pp. 187–189 of his 1996 edition.

¹⁹ At about the same time, imitations from the *Dialogi* are recognizable in two saints' lives composed by Gualferius Salernitanus (*PL* 147.1293–1310), who was active in the same area and lived at Montecassino.

²⁰ A further problem is posed by the beginning of *De Ira*, 1–2.3, where A left f. 14^r blank, probably because the exemplar was illegible; a later, twelfth-century hand (a) supplied the

The tragedies are transmitted by two independent branches. The more authoritative, the ϵ -family, is represented in its pure form by the single eleventh-century codex *Etruscus* (Florence, *Laurentianus* 37.3), identified by Giuseppe Billanovich with the tragedies listed in a catalogue of classical books owned by Santa Maria della Pomposa, near Ferrara, dated from 1093. An excerpt from the tragedies in a ninth-century MS, perhaps written in Fleury, now Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *lat.* 8071) the *Florilegium Thuaneum*, was traditionally related to the same family.²¹ However, the ϵ -family produced no offspring until *E* was rediscovered by Lovato de' Lovati and brought to the attention of the Paduan pre-humanist. However, *E* later fell into oblivion; the first modern editor to use it was J.F. Gronovius, who saw it in Florence in 1640 while preparing his edition of 1661. The second, so-called "interpolated," family, *A*, encompasses by far the majority of the 400-odd known MSS. It is French in origin and must have come from a MS that resurfaced probably at the end of the twelfth century. The two earliest representatives of the further two branches in which *A* is subdivided, δ and β , are, respectively, *P* (*Parisinus Latinus* 8260) and *C* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 406). It is clear that the two families depend on two late-antique subarchetypes and that the entire tradition is ultimately derived from the same, corrupt archetype.

The tradition of the satirical *Apocolocyntosis* rests on about forty MSS, of which only three are used by editors, that is *S*, Sankt-Gallen 569, *V*, Valenciennes 411, and London, British Library Additional 11983. The tradition is bipartite, with *V* and *L* forming the second family. Only *S* and *L* produced copies. Knowledge of the *Apocolocyntosis* began to spread at about the same time as the earliest MS, *S*: an unmistakable echo of *apocol.* 1.2 f. is found in Paschasius Radbertus's *Vita Walae* or *Epitaphium Arsenii*, written after 846 (*PL* 120.1563), even if, curiously, Seneca's satiric element is completely missed.

text printed in modern editions, up to *capitis damna<tos>*. This means that in the twelfth century a twin or even the exemplar of *A* was still available. However, the *a*-text is different from both β and γ . This means that, for this section, the parent of β also drew on a MS more complete than *A*.

²¹ For a different view, namely that the *Florilegium Thuaneum* goes back to a non-bifurcated stage of the Seneca tradition, see Brugnoli 2000b.

PART ONE

LIFE AND LEGACY

Seneca and Senecae: Images of Seneca from Antiquity to Present

SENECA THE PHILOSOPHER*

Matthias Laarmann

1. ANOMALIES OF FAME; OR, SENECA'S JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

It is necessary to keep considerable prosopographical and biobibliographical peculiarities constantly in mind in order to be able to appraise the legacy of Seneca the Younger from antiquity to the present day in an adequate fashion.¹

First, already in the Early Middle Ages, the distinction between *Seneca rhetor* (Seneca the Elder) and *Seneca philosophus* (Seneca the Younger) was lost. Only the lawyer Andrea Alciati (1492–1550) and ultimately Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) and the Jesuit Andreas Schott (1552–1629) were able to regain this knowledge (van der Poel 1984: 262–264). Second, early humanists—the first was probably Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) around 1365—distinguished between a *Seneca moralis*, to whom the prose works were ascribed, and a *Seneca tragicus*, who was regarded as the author of the tragedies (D'Alessi 1978). The fact that *Seneca tragicus* was identical with *Seneca philosophus* was proved by the Jesuit Martin Antonio Delrio (1551–1608) and the Latin philologist Isaac Pontanus (1571–1639; see van der Poel 1984: 264–266). Third, the widespread fame Seneca enjoyed from the early medieval period until the Renaissance was based on texts, above all collections of sayings, that were not in fact written by Seneca but ascribed to him due to a closeness of content and style (among them was even a collection of aphorisms of Arabian-Oriental origin; see Blüher 1969: 54 f.). Fourth, Seneca's journey through the Middle Ages would be unthinkable without taking the history of the reception of the apocryphal exchange of letters between him and Paulus into account, a correspondence that gave a considerable boost to a positive perception of

* Translated by Tobias Budke.

¹ Overviews can be found in Summers 1910: xcvi–cxiv; Faider 1921; Blüher 1969: 13–175; Spanneut 1973; Ross 1974; Spanneut 1980; Armisen-Marchetti 1989; Spanneut 1990; Dionigi 1999; Trovato 2005; Walter 2006; Carron 2007; Kraye 2007. Due to limited space, this chapter will focus mainly on the reception history in German-speaking areas.

Seneca-like philosophizing. However, this exchange and its reception history will only be touched upon in this chapter (for more detail on this, see Fürst, *infra*, pp. 213 f.).

2. A REEVALUATION OF EVALUATION; OR, ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY BUCKING THE TREND

Already during his lifetime, Seneca became the darling of the public and a writer whose subject matter fascinated readers of all ages—who saw it as being of topical interest and vitally important—and whose brilliant style evoked enthusiastic reactions especially among young readers (Trillitzsch 1971). But, near the end of the 1st century AD, Seneca's critics mustered and intensified their moral and above all stylistic objections to his works. This increasingly critical and hostile attitude regarding pagan culture bearers from antiquity could be discovered by Latin-speaking Christians of the first two centuries AD, for example, in the works of Quintilian (*inst.* 10.1.126), Fronto (*Ad M. Antoninum de orationibus* 2–3), or Aulus Gellius (12.2; see Kraye 2007: 826–829). Nevertheless, Seneca did not disappear completely from the canon of literature and education. This was indirectly attested by Augustine (conf. 5.6.11), who admitted that his opponent, the not very well educated Faustus of Riez, was at least acquainted with various speeches by Cicero and also with some writings by Seneca.

“But at the very moment when the stylists rejected Seneca's language, the Christians learned to appreciate his subject matter” (Summers 1910: xcvi; regarding the subjects that were adopted, see Spanneut 1957). Tertullian († ca. 220), already inclined to Stoic philosophy, cried out, full of enthusiasm: *Seneca saepe noster* (*De anima* 20.1. CCSL 2: 811, 3). Lactantius († 325), who had access to many of Seneca's writings now lost (*Exhortationes*, *De immatura morte*, *Libri morales*, or *Libri moralis philosophiae*, resp.; Lausberg 1970) even conjectured that Seneca would have converted to Christianity, if only someone had conveyed to him the message of the Gospel (*inst.* 6.24.14; Spanneut 1990: 584 f.). The Christian declarations of sympathy reached their peak with Jerome (347–420), who included the Roman philosopher in his catalogue of Christian writers, *De viris illustribus*, and who ascribed to him a correspondence (actually apocryphal) with Paul the Apostle (see *infra*, pp. 213 f.). In this, Jerome assumed a close affinity between the Stoics and Christianity: *nostro dogmati in plerisque concordant* (*Comm. in Esaiam* 4.11. PL 24: 147). His friend Augustine (354–430), although he displayed only a passing interest in Seneca's sayings in his works, introduced him nonetheless between 413

and 415 as a critic of pagan polytheism (civ. 6.10 f.) and accepted Jerome's thesis concerning the correspondence between Seneca and Paul (*epist.* 153.14. CSEL 44: 412). The only place where a principal rejection of Seneca based on the pagan character of his thoughts can be found is a poem of the *Anthologia Latina* that has been handed down anonymously and has sometimes been ascribed to one Honorius scholasticus from the 6th century (nr. 666. ed. Riese 1894²; see Trillitzsch 1971: I 191–193; II 385 f.; Fohlen 2002: 52 f.). Generally speaking, though, it must be stated that, for all the sympathy he evoked from Christians, Seneca's philosophy never became a determining factor in Christian theology (see Herrmann 1979; Krefeld 1992b; Fuhrmann 1997: 329–340).

3. A MERRY-GO-ROUND EXCHANGE; OR, COMPILATION AND CONFUSION BETWEEN ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES

The premodern concept of the “author” makes the well-nigh infinite will-
ingness of the time to compile and quote without giving any sources under-
standable. Regarding the reception history of Seneca's works, this was to
become their biggest advantage. For more than a thousand years, Bishop
Martin of Braga (ca. 515–580) became a relay station for Seneca's reception
(Blüher 1969: 24–28; Trillitzsch 1971: I 211–221). From Seneca's *De ira*, Martin
extracted a treatise bearing the same title. From Seneca's *De officiis*, now lost,
he compiled a writing that became known either as *Formula vitae honestae*,
De quattuor virtutibus, or—complemented by sentences from the *Epistulae
morales*—as *De copia verborum* (Trillitzsch 1971: II 393–399). As the more
than 600 extant manuscripts show, it became immensely popular during
the Middle Ages and was at times considered one of Seneca's main works;
until the 17th century it was seen as a basic presentation of Christian edu-
cation. (Bickel 1905a; Fohlen 1980; Spanneut 1990: 586 f.; Orselli 1999; Torre
2006).

This confusion led to profusion. A large number of florilegia (Meerseman
1973; Munk Olsen 2000; Walter 2006: 135 f.), helped by Seneca's attractive
aphoristic-sententious style, ensured a high presence of Seneca's or Seneca-
like sentences, but without providing a clear grasp of the methodical sig-
nificance of his philosophical concept as a whole. Among these were, for
example, the *Florilegium morale Oxoniense* (ed. Talbot, C.H. *Analecta Medi-
aevalia Namursiensia* 1956) and the *Auctoritates Aristotelis, Senecae, Boethii*
... (ed. Hamesse, J. 1974. *Philosophes Medievaux* 17: 273–286). Substantial
excerpts were provided by Roger Bacon (1214–1292/94) in his *Opus magnum*

(ed. Bridges, J.H. 1900: 299–365), and it was Bacon who, incidentally, in 1246 rediscovered Seneca's *Dialogi* and ensured their circulation. Among the encyclopedists, Vincent de Beauvais's (1184/94–ca. 1264) *Speculum historiale* VIII, chap. 102–135 (written ca. 1247–1260; ed. Douai 1624: IV 309–320; Ruhe 1969) occupied a central position due to its large number of quotations. In any case, the extremely positive resonance Seneca had with his Christian readers eliminated almost all of the negative judgments pagan antiquity had passed upon him because of his style (be it literary or life) until, not before the 15th century, Italian humanists rediscovered the writings of Tacitus and Cassius Dio, the most important authors to pass on the ancient tradition of adverse criticism.

4. PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANIZATION; OR, INCORPORATING SENECA INTO SPIRITUAL-MONASTIC THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS OF GOVERNMENT

In the 12th century, the “Christianization” of Seneca was widely established (Nothdurft 1963; Spanneut 1964; Lapidge 1988; Töpfer 1996; Smiraglia 2000). For Peter Abelard (1079–1142), Seneca was *maximus ille paupertatis et continentiae sectator et summus inter universos philosophos morum aedificator* (*epist.* 8. PL 178: 297B). In the opinion of Godfrey of Saint-Victor (1125/30–ca. 1185), Seneca's teachings came a close second to the Gospel itself (*Fons philosophiae* 410–412: *Quid tibi de Seneca documentis edam? / Seneca Lucilio commendavit quedam, / que vix evangelio postponendam credam*), causing Walter of Saint-Victor († 1180) to reply to this high praise in a work called *De blanda et ideo mortifera Senecae doctrina* (ed. Mastandrea 1988: 80–83). William of St. Thierry (1075/80–1154), Alanus ab Insulis (ca. 1120–1202), William of Conches (ca. 1180/90–after 1154) and especially John of Salisbury (ca. 1115/20–1180)—incidentally one of the very few medieval authors to defend Seneca's style against his critics from antiquity (Kraye 2007: 830)—made similarly emphatic statements (Smiraglia 2000: 272–274). Our Roman philosopher was enjoying a huge success even in the sermons written during that era (Spanneut 1990: 588). The theological-spiritual reception reached a climax with the *Epistola ad fratres de monte Dei* (ed. Dechanet 1983²; Middle High German translation ed. Honermann, V. MTU 61. 1978) by William of St. Thierry (Déchanet 1951). A later echo can be found in the works of Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260–1326). He adopted Seneca's dictum *Nulla sine deo mens bona est. Semina in corporibus humanis divina sunt* (*epist.* 73.16) several times to his theory of *unio mystica* (*Expos. libri Sapientiae* nr. 52. LW II 379,4–12; *Liber*

parabolarum Genesis, nr. 198. LW I/1 670,13–671,9; *Von dem edeln Menschen*. DW V 111,9–21; see also Bray 2008: 177–181).

Seneca's doxographic overviews of the Platonic teachings regarding ideas and the Aristotelian teachings regarding causes in his *Epistulae morales* 58 and 65 (cf. Theiler 1934: 1–10, 15–26, 34–39; Long and Sedley 1987: No. 27A with commentary; Krefeld 1991: 5–58) enjoyed a first intensive reception in the 12th century in the works of Achard of St. Victor (1100–1172), *De unitate divinae essentiae et pluralitate creaturarum* (ed. Martineau 1987), as well as in those of Thierry of Chartres (1085–1155) and John of Salisbury (Nothdurft 1962: 182–191), and gained an additional boost at the end of the 13th century, influenced by Robert Kilwardby (ca. 1215–1275) and Henry of Ghent (1217–1293), *Quodlibeta* 7.2 and 9.2 (Hübener 1977; Laarmann 1991: 57 f.). Regarding the phrase *aliquid, quo nihil maius cogitari posit*, of central importance for Anselm of Canterbury's (1033–1109) ontological proof of God's existence, it is possible to consider a link to phrases originating with Seneca (*nat.* I, praef. 13; *epist.* 58.17; Nothdurft 1962: 192–201; Vinti 1979; Laarmann 1991: 147 f.).

That Seneca was easily accepted into the Franciscan school is well attested by Bonaventura (1221–1274; see Rivier de Ventosa 1965). Seneca, the tutor of princes, was also given a permanent place in the “Mirrors of princes” genre (Spanneut 1990; 588 f.). The conservative Franciscan theologian Guibert de Tournai, in his 1259 *Eruditio regum et principum* 3.3 (de Poorter 1914: 200–222; partial German trans. in Anton 2006: 288–447, esp. 432–435), for example, referred with many variations to Seneca's concept of *clementia*, which he modified according to the perspective of the Christian theory of *affectus pietatis*.

5. SENECA DISPUTATUS; OR, THE OPPRESSIVE DOMINANCE OF ARISTOTELIANISM IN ACADEMIC SCHOLASTICISM

The university was invented in the Christian Middle Ages. However: “Nothing is more distant from our university and school teaching, itself cut off from life, than ancient philosophy, which understood itself as ‘ars dicendi’ and ‘ars vivendi’ at the same time” according to the trenchant judgment of Pierre Hadot (1989c: 799). How was Seneca going to find his way around the structure of this new and institutional form of philosophy?

The scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages was ruled by Aristotelianism. Term, conclusion, judgment were the tools of logical thinking. With Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), who quotes Seneca above all in his doctrine of the affections (Verbeke 1961, 1983; Spanneut 1990: 590 f.), as well as with all

other scholastic writers, Seneca's stimulating, psychagogically aimed rhetoric as an integrated component of a therapeutic directive to achieve the ascetic self-control of an ethically educated mind, unaffected by Fate and Death and given to leisure, fell by the wayside as far as interpretation was concerned. What was preferably sought after—in a process of hermeneutically questionable adaptation—were terms equivalent to the established terminology of Aristotelian philosophy, as can be seen in the *Super X libros Aristotelis ad Nicomachum* 10.4 (ed. 1489, fol. 209ra–211 vb) of John Buridan (ca. 1300–ca. 1358), a student of Ockham, who at length confronted an Aristotelian virtue ethics transformed by Christianity with the Stoic virtue ethics of Seneca (Walsh 1966; Korolec 1979).

As a reader-friendly effect of the scholastic-formal treatment of problems, which, at the same time, revealed the disparity of Senecan and scholastic philosophizing (in the sense used by Hadot, P. 1989c: 799), one must regard the lemmatization of Seneca's texts in register-like *tabulae* (Fohlen 2002: 19–22). A remarkable instance of such a systematic access to the texts was provided by the Dominican Lucas Mannelli († 1362), the Bishop of Osimo. To Pope Clement VI (1341–1352) he gave a work including a dedication, a prologue, and two series of lemmas (*Abstinencia-Iuuenis et Labor-Ydea*) (Kaeppeli 1948; Munk Olsen 2000: 174 f.; Fohlen 2002: 67 f.). This alphabetically arranged Seneca florilegium was later translated—to give only one example—into Spanish, probably at the instigation of King Martin I, by Alonso de Carragena (1385/86–1456), the Bishop of Burgos and a well-known representative of scholastic theology (Blüher 1969: 98 f., 101 f.). Typical of the medieval-scholastic treatment of Seneca was the constant production of commentaries on the texts and florilegia, stemming from a theologically sophisticated knowledge of the differing Christian aspects, not indulging in unconsidered affirmation and undertaking an ongoing Christian rectification of Seneca's ancient autosoteric views. Insofar as in this way any kind of unreserved and uncritical hero-worship of ancient and pagan writers—something that had been sometimes observable since early humanism—was opposed, the scholastic reception of Seneca finds itself unexpectedly close to the position held by modern historical and critical Seneca philology, which emphasizes the epochal alterity of the autosoterics of ancient-pagan, especially Seneca's, thinking in contrast to the theosoteric fundamental position of Christianity (Füerst 2006: 85–107; Fuhrer 2006: 108–125).

6. PRAISE AND REPRIMAND; OR, BOLSTERED FAME AND THE SEEDS OF CRITICISM IN 13TH–15TH-CENTURY HUMANISM

Early humanism prepared the ground for Seneca's true *aurea aetas*. Even if the paintings of Peter Paul Rubens may come to the mind of the modern observer far more easily and quickly, the unsurpassable visual culmination point of the history of Seneca's reception and influence for *Seneca philosophus* was doubtless the illustration on the cover of this volume showing the Codex Glasgow, Hunterian Library MS 231, created by Roger of Waltham (†1336), a canon of St Paul's, London, who served as King Edward II's Keeper of the Wardrobe from 1322–1323: three people, anachronistically clad in garments worn by university professors—unacceptable to the well-educated Seneca, who held self-centered, sterile book knowledge in contempt (see, for example, *epist.* 98)—are holding books containing significant theological theses in their hands. They are the two giants of classic Greek philosophy, Plato on the right and Aristotle on the left. Seneca—and not, as one would expect, Socrates—occupies the center! Through the arrangement of quotations for Plato and Aristotle, the orientation toward an ideal of theory can be perceived, while Seneca is a witness for the prioritization of ethics according to the Hellenistic schools of philosophy.

The parade of the early humanist *laudatores Senecae* was, in chronological terms, led by Dante (1265–1321), for whom Seneca was above all “Seneca morale” (Mezzadrolì 1990; Pasquini 1999). Around 1365, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) developed his thesis, inspired by an epigram of Martial (1.61.7) and propagated through his commentary on Dante's *Divina commedia*, of the necessity of distinguishing between a *Seneca rhetoricus* and a *Seneca tragicus* (ad *Inf.* 4.141, ed. Padoan 1965: 252), a viewpoint shared in 1371 by Coluccio Salutati (*epist.* 3.8, ed. Novati 1891: I 150–155), who referred to Sidonius Appollinaris (*carm.* 9: *Ad Felicem*, vv. 230–238)—an error that was to survive for more than two centuries (Martellotti 1972; D'Alessi 1987). Albertino Mussato (1261–1329) and Giovanni Colonna (†1348), one of Petrarch's patrons, provide the first instances of the claim that Seneca had not only been a friend of St. Paul the Apostle but also a Christian himself (Momigliano 1950: 70f.; Sottili 2004: 676–678). Seneca's works turn up several times in the list of favorite books (*libri mei peculiare*s) drawn up by Petrarch (1304–1374; see Ullman 1923; Bobbio 1943), with *De brevitae vitae* occupying a special position insofar as Petrarch found there the main arguments in favor of the *vita contemplativa* in his discussion of *otium-negotium* (Enenkel 1999). The Italian early humanist and theoretician of epistolography Gasparino Barzizza (ca. 1360–ca. 1431) was starting to hold lectures on Seneca in Padua



The texts read: Plato (left): *Genitorem et opificem universitatis tam est difficile invenire, quam inventum digne profari* (from Chalcidius, *Commentary on the Timaeus of Plato*); Seneca (center): *Si vis deo propinquare, bonus esto. Si vis habere honorem, dabo tibi magnum imperium imperare* (see for this Briggs 2008: 32–34); Aristotle (right): *Prima causa est nobilissima, quae non alteratur nec mutatur, set (= sed) manet in sempiternum completa et perfecta* (from Aristoteles, *De caelo*, and Averroes thereon).

around 1407 (Panizza 1977 and 1984; Gualdo Rosa 2009). The philological and interpretative zeal of the humanists produced—as far as we know—at least five commentaries on the first epistle of the *Epistulae morales* (Fohlen 2002: 23).

Vitae of Seneca also proliferated.² The Plutarch-inspired parallel biography *Vitae Socratis et Senecae* (ed. Baldassari and Bagemihl 2003: 164–287; the part covering Seneca: 234–287), written in 1440 by Gianozzo Manetti (1396–1459), defended Seneca in detail against the criticism leveled against him above all by Tacitus, Quintilian, Gellius, and Petrarch (no. 29).

A rare example of Christian-theological frontal criticism brought forward in a polemical tone can be found in the 15th-century French manuscript version of *Monitum contra Senecae epistulas*, in which the insurmountable incompatibility of Seneca's thought with the Catholic faith is claimed:

Ammonendus est, lector, ne hoc uolumen epistolarum Senece indiscrete et absque magna cautela quasi alicuius catholici uiri opus percurrat. [...] Ipse enim auctor, licet ingeniosus et disertus, catholice tamen ueritati ignarus in plerisque locis a ueritate fidei inuenitur plurimum discrepare. [...] Diligencia adhibenda est quatinus preciosum a uili separetur.

(ed. Fohlen 2002: 24 n. 81; 69)

Seneca was admitted to the literary canon of the *Devotio moderna*, particularly because the founder of the Brethren of the Common Life, Geert Groote (1340–1385), quoted liberally from Seneca's works in his own texts (Meerseman 1973; Walter 2006: 138 f.). In Thomas à Kempis's (1379/80–1471) *Libri de imitatione Christi*, written between 1414 and 1425 and probably next to the Vulgate Bible the most frequently printed Christian book in Latin, the author refers in several important passages to Seneca, although the latter is never named.³

² Some examples are: Iohannes de Columna, *De uiris illustribus* (extr.: *De Seneca Lucilio, Cordubensi*) (ed. Ross 1970: 555–559), Iohannes Gallensis, *Compendium de uita illustrium philosophorum et dictis moralibus eorundem* 4.17: *De Seneca* (ed. Venise 1496: ff. 211–211^v), Sicco Polentonius (1377–1447), *De illustribus scriptoribus linguae latinae* (1437), chap. 17–18 (ed. Ullmann 1928: 463–499; cf. Fohlen 2002: 74 f.), Paulus Pompilius (1453–1491), *Vita Senecae* (ed. Faider 1921: 281–323; cf. Fohlen 2002: 70), Petrus Paulus Vergerius, *De uita Senecae* (ed. Ziliotto and Vidossich 1906: 355 f.).

³ In Thomas à Kempis, *De imitatione Christi* 1.5 (*De lectione sanctorum scripturarum*; Op. omn. II, p. 12 f., esp. 12, lin. 20–28), Seneca's demand to apply special qualitative criteria when choosing suitable authors and texts for reading (*epist.* 2.4) is in the background. The sentence *Quotiens inter homines fui, minor homo redii* (1.20: *De amore solitudinis et silentii*; Op. omn. II, p. 36, lin. 26 f.) is a chiastically varying echo of Seneca's phrase on the morally questionable worth of mass events (*epist.* 7.3: *Auarior redeo, ambitiosior, luxuriosior? Immo vero crudelior et inhumanius, quia inter homines fui*).

Since the 12th century, Seneca's personal piety—not unlike Socrates's (Laarmann 1995b)—had frequently been perceived in a positive way, from the 14th century onward almost invariably so. Following the lead of Boccaccio, who was probably the first to formulate the idea—which was to attain a wide circulation during early humanism—that Seneca must be saved from eternal damnation (see Monti 2007), Heinrich von Neustadt (Singer 1906: v. 4804) and Hugo von Langenstein, who even explicitly mentioned Seneca's suicide (Keller 1856: 21c67), ranked him among those heroes worthy of salvation who were permitted to stay in limbo (Laarmann 1991). From the end of the 13th century onward, it is possible to trace the legend according to which Seneca was really a Christian, a legend probably invented by Albertino Mussato (1261–1329; see Sottili 2004: 676–678) and still alive during the 19th century (Momigliano 1950; Panizza 1974). The Carmelite prior John of Hildesheim (†1375) wrote the poetical *Laus Pauli et Senece* (*epist.* 33; ed. Schmidt 2005: 250f.). With Seneca regularly mentioned as an exponent of the School of Wisdom, several collections of his sayings, which contained both Seneca's own and Seneca-like *dicta*, were circulating (Ochsenbein 2000). For example, the great council theologian Johannes Nider, O.P. (ca. 1380–1438), ascribed the following dictum to Seneca: “Vnd wer kein got, dennoch solt man tugent würgen” (“And if there were no God, one nevertheless ought to act according to virtue”; quoted in Williams 1989: 405, and Henkel 1992: 1994).⁴ Thus, the late medieval *Seneca receptus* provided a link between the *per impossibile* hypotheses of the nonexistence of God found in high scholasticism and the motto *Etsi deus non daretur* propagated by Hugo Grotius, which marks the modern, rational-autonomous natural law (Laarmann 1995c).

7. THE STRUGGLE FOR AUTHORSHIP AND HEGEMONY OF INTERPRETATION; OR, SENECA AND HIS WORK DURING RENAISSANCE HUMANISM AND 16TH-CENTURY NEO-STOICISM

Seneca became the patron of a whole era. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/69–1536)—especially during the first half of his life—displayed an enormous liking of Seneca and his style (Trillitzsch 1965 and 1971: I 221–250; Walter 2008: 130f.), as can be seen in his prologue to the 1515 edition of Seneca (*epist.* 325; ed. Allen et al. 1906–1958: II 51–54, Latin-German version: Fürst 2006: 74–79;

⁴ Hans Sachs, however, places Seneca's way of knowing God in opposition to the Christian one (Brunner/Wachinger 1986 ff.: 2S/3248).

German trans. Trillitzsch 1981b: 327–331; English trans. *Collected Works* 1989: 29, 111–222; on the interpretation, see Sottili 2004: 647–667) and even more clearly in his *praefatio* to the 1523 edition of Cicero's *Tusculanes* (*epist.* 1390, ed. Allen et al. 1906–1958: V 103 ff.; Trillitzsch 1971: I 223).

Seneca's presence in the discussions of humanist peace ethics found in the works of John Colet (1467–1519), Thomas More⁵ (1478–1535), and Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) also made itself felt in Erasmus's *Querela pacis* (1517), the first clarion call of rational pacifism (Adams 1962; Dust 1987). Vives himself recommended Seneca as a warner and a prophet for a Christianity in need of reform: *Audi Senecam, hominem gentilem, Christianos edocentem, quae illum conveniebat potius a Christianis discere* (*De subventione pauperum*, praef.; Blüher 1969: 200–218).

The proponents of the Reformation saw Seneca in a positive light, although Martin Luther (1483–1546) denied, in his metaphysical analysis of human action, that there was a possibility of acting morally outside Grace and explicitly criticized a dictum by Seneca (*Tischreden* 2873, 2890, WA 56: 236, 32 f.; Dieter 2001: 105). But Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), in 1530, put Seneca on the same pedestal as Moses, Paul, and Plato and spoke respectfully of *Seneca, animorum unicus ex gentibus agricola* (*De providentia* 2.3. ed. SW 93, 95; Dilthey 1914: 155 ff.). The fact that John Calvin (1509–1564), while still a Catholic clergyman, had written a commentary on Seneca's *De clementia* (ed. Battles and Hugo 1969), in which he conferred the title *et philosophiae et eloquentiae columen* on him—second only to Cicero—paved the way for the facilitated reception of Seneca already during the time of early Calvinism (Strohm 1999).

Justus Lipsius of Brabant (1547–1606) must be considered the founder of European Neo-Stoicism (Kraye 1988: 367–374). Above all, between 1579 and 1591, as a professor of history and law in Leiden with the humanists Isaac Casaubon and Joseph Justus Scaliger, whose fame had already spread all over Europe, as his colleagues, he became a leading figure in late humanism. Already early on—between 1557 and 1559—he had developed his enthusiasm

⁵ For Thomas More, the active involvement with Seneca reached far beyond direct quotations; Seneca was for him a true companion in life, even in his darkest hours. More, a father of four children between the ages of one and six who had become a widower in 1511 when he was 33, married the widow Alice Middleton in the same year. During the following years of marriage, he put great emphasis, quite unusual at the time, on the best possible education and high-quality teaching of his daughters, especially in the case of Margaret, who spoke Latin and Greek fluently. In a family portrait, the original of which has unfortunately not survived and which was painted by Hans Holbein, a close friend of the family, in 1528/29, Margaret is reaching out to touch a book written by—Seneca! (Espiner-Scott 1960).

for Seneca and Tacitus from Marcus Antonius Muretus (1526–1585) in Rome in the circle surrounding the highly educated cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517–1586), and he went on to produce philologically epoch-making new editions of both writers' works.⁶ With these editions—the *Manuductionis ad Stoicam philosophiam libri tres*, published in 1605, were originally meant as the introduction to the edition of Seneca's works—Lipsius vigorously took part in the debate about Ciceronianism as the best rhetorical style and by his determined rejection of the ancient criticism of Seneca's style caused a wave of "Senecaism" (a term probably coined by T.S. Eliot; Kraye 2007: 826, 834 f.) and "Tacitism" (van der Poel and Waszink 2009: 414) that was to last almost a full century.

The dialogic work *De constantia* (ed. Neumann 1998), published by Lipsius in 1584 (and to the present day without a critical edition)—"the flagship of Neo-Stoicism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and a bestseller of its time" (Hartung 1999: 926b)—marked the final abandonment of the Platonist and Epicurean preferences of early humanism and the consequent embracing of a neo-Stoicism (Oesterreich 1989) in which the freedom-denying concept of *fatum* conceived by the older Stoa is criticized and further developed toward a theory of *fatum* in which the *ratio* of man and his free *iudicium* enable him to assume a self-determined position relative to *fatum*. "Will, reason, discipline are from now on becoming dominant values of the time" (Oesterreich 1975: 183), with Seneca's *vivere militare est* (*epist.* 96.5) as the dominant metaphor (Sommer 2008). With his *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex* (ed. Weber 1998), an annotated collection of quotations from ancient literature (with 547 quotations from Tacitus alone!), first published in 1589 and, with 36 reprints, an extremely successful work, Lipsius created the counterpart to the *Libri de constantia*. Whereas the first work was an instruction manual for the self-preservation of the individual, the later work did the same for the self-preservation of the sociopolitical body. Also worth mentioning are the painting "The Death of Seneca" (created in 1612/13; see Brandt 2000: 226–239) by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), a member of the inner circle around Lipsius, and an untitled painting that was later named "Justus Lipsius and His Friends" (ca. 1615) and shows Lipsius and Seneca together (see Brandt 2000: 240–245). Both paintings have become important paratexts of Seneca reception, especially "in an age

⁶ Lipsius, by the way, adorned his edition of Seneca (1605, 1615²) with a dedicatory poem written by himself (ed. / trans. Schäfer 2005)—the addressee being none other than Seneca himself, of course!

of technical reproduction” of works of art (Walter Benjamin). This Seneca euphoria, created by secular neo-Stoicism, did not stop at church doors. The Jesuit Johann Baptist Schellenberg (1586–1645) wrote the anthology *Seneca christianus, id est Flores christiani ex L. Ann. Senecae epistolis collecti* (Augsburg, 1637), a work that, together with its translations, was printed in an astonishing number of variant editions under different titles (Sommervogel 1890–1932: VII 741 f.).

8. TRANSLATIONS, ADAPTATIONS, VARIATIONS; OR, SENECA IN THE EUROPEAN NATIONS DURING THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

In the same way the subject matter treated by Seneca had done before, this era saw his writings enter the vernacular languages. In Spain, there had been continuously increasing attempts at this from the 13th century onward (Blüher 1969: 94–117). In Germany, the process of translating Seneca, already well-established and documented as a widespread phenomenon during the second half of the 15th century, was intensified during the first half of the 16th century, with Dietrich von Pleningen and Michael Herr being the most important names in this context (Worstbrock 1976). As for the English-speaking world, one should refer to the overviews made by W.C. Summers (1910: civ–cxiv), J. Espiner-Scott (1960), and G. Monsarrat (1974). Regarding the reception of Seneca in France during the 16th and 17th centuries—a time when this reception had found an especially influential exponent in Michel Montaigne (1533–1592; see Friedrich 1967: 62–68; Albrecht 2004: 173–192; Kraye 2007: 836)—the groundbreaking studies written by Julien Eymard d'Angers (ed. Antoine 1976) provide an excellent insight (see also Tobin 1971; Roche 1974; Spanneut 1990: 591–596). Spain went through a heyday of “Senequismo” (Blüher 1969) represented above all by Francisco Quevedo (1580–1645) and Baltasar Gracian (1601–1658; see Blüher 1969: 326–370, 371–447). Northern Europe did not lag far behind: even a number of misogynic statements to be found in Seneca’s works (Manning 1973) did not prevent a woman, Birgitte Thott (1610–1662), from breaking into the phalanx of vernacular translators and, in 1658, becoming the first Danish translator of the moral writings of Seneca (Jensen 1995: 44).

The ways in which Seneca was received within the rationalist and empiricist philosophical systems of the modern age are seldom clearly recognizable, and a complete analysis will yet have to be undertaken by scholars. In his letters to Princess Elisabeth of Sweden, René Descartes (1578–1650) thoroughly discussed Seneca’s *De vita beata* (epist. 397 ff. *Oeuvres*, ed. Adam and

Thannery, IV 263 ff.). The Stoicism of Seneca and Epictetus inspired him during his conception of a “morale provisoire” (Julien-Eymard d’Angers 1976: 453–480), although he himself and to an even larger degree his pupil Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715; see Kraye 2007: 837) rejected Seneca’s rhetorically charged style. Among the representatives of German school philosophy, Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) was most prominent because of the intensive academic treatment of Seneca’s *De ira* and his doctrine of the affections he provided in the lectures he held (Wundt 1945: 37, 43, 51). The degree of influence ancient-stoic philosophemes had on Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) is currently a topic of controversy (Klessinger 2008). It is known, however, that Seneca’s *Epistulae* formed a part of his private library (Klessinger 2008: 998 f.). Furthermore, Seneca is quoted by name in an important passage of Spinoza’s *Ethica* (5.42s). David Hume (1711–1776) presented Seneca in his *Dialogues concerning natural religion*—written in 1751, but published not before 1779—as an icon of rational religion, with Hume summing up his concept of a natural religion with a quotation from Seneca (*epist.* 95.47): *deum colit, qui novit*; everything else he considered “absurd, superstitious, or even impious” (ed. Gaskin 1993: no. 140).

At the beginning of the Baroque era in Germany, the Silesian Martin Opitz (1597–1639) picked up the impulses coming from his teacher in Leiden, Daniel Heinsius (1580–1655), and became a great inspirer of Seneca reception (Stemplinger 1903; Stalder 1976; Wollgast 1988: 806–826; Riedel 2000: 85–91), a reception that has been investigated in the context of—among other things—the martyr plays (Grätz 2008) and the didactic drama (Riedel 2000: 72 f.) but also the bucolic and *laus ruris* poetry of the time (Lohmeier 1981). In addition to Opitz, Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664; see Riedel 2000: 93–96; Grätz 2008), Daniel Casper von Lohenstein (1635–1683; see Riedel 2000: 97–100), and Johann Christian Hallmann (ca. 1640–1704; see Riede 2000: 100 f.) deserve to be mentioned.

The German literature of the 18th century, however, saw the continuous growth of a fundamental criticism of Seneca (Merrifield 1967). At first, there were still eminent supporters of Seneca like the tireless Wolffian Johann Gottfried Gottsched (1700–1766), who saw himself fully obliged to adhere to Seneca’s stylistic ideas (*Ausführliche Redekunst*, XVI. *Hauptstück*. 1736; Merrifield 1967: 531, 533). During the heyday of the Enlightenment, Gottfried Ephraim Lessing’s essay “Von den lateinischen Trauerspielen, welche unter dem Namen des Seneca bekannt sind” had a rather explosive effect insofar as Lessing was proclaiming the rejection of the heroic depiction of virtue in favor of the bourgeois-sentimental tragedy (Merrifield 1967: 537 f.; Barner 1973; Riedel 2000: 135–140).

The turning point toward a downright hostile rejection of Seneca in German literature is associated with Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), who was highly influential because of his translations of Horace and Lucian (Merrifield 1967: 529, 535, 537) and who, in the tradition of Horace's criticism of the Stoa (*sat.* 1.3; 2.3), found fault with Seneca's doctrine of the affections, which he considered bloodless and emotionally cold. In addition, the Enlightenment philosopher Christian Fürchtegott (1715–1769) charged Seneca with self-salvation and self-apotheosis (Späth 1992: VI 37 f.). A critical saturation bombing against Seneca as a philosopher, writer, politician, and private person was carried out by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) in his treatise “Vom Einfluss der Regierung auf die Wissenschaften, und der Wissenschaften auf die Regierung” (1779): “If the Stoic philosophy of pretty words, lofty sayings, and unworthy living, if the philosophical education of a regent and the selfsame regent's government under the eyes of his very well-paid teacher can ever have a stigma, they have it here” (trans. T. Budke; *Werke*, ed. Suphan 1877–1887: IX 389; Merrifield 1967: 535, 538). The fact that Herder later rescinded this verdict under the influence of Diderot (*Werke* XVIII/2, 391–401) did not receive any attention. Neither the continuing Seneca reception by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1721–1778; see Bosshard 1967) nor the passionate attempts to rehabilitate Seneca to be found in Denis Diderot's (1713–1784) two-part “Essai sur la vie de Sénèque, sur ses écrits et sur les règnes de Claude et Néron” (1778/82; German edition 1782, trans. F.L. Epheu; Conroy 1975) exerted any measurable influence.

9. THE OPAQUE CONTINUUM; OR, SENECA'S DORMANT PRESENCE IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL MOVEMENTS OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Exit Seneca—literally and metaphorically. First, his plays, which had fascinated Europe for centuries, were culled from theater repertoires. Second, the prevailing preference for Greek culture and the original pathos of humanism was eroding the reputation of our Roman author as a writer and thinker. The persistent ancient tradition of passing harsh judgments on his personal conduct accelerated this process. Thus, the enthusiasm for Seneca displayed by the two main exponents of German Classicism, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), did not survive once they had reached maturity (Merrifield 1967: 531, 539–547; Albrecht 1999: 278–285).

For G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), who discusses the Stoa in his “Lectures on the History of Philosophy” (ed. R.F. Brown; trans. R.F. Brown and J.M. Stewart

2006: II 265–279) the basic flaw of Roman philosophy, namely the complete loss of speculative interest (ibid. 260) becomes obvious in the works of Seneca, who “is known as a certain, limited Stoic” (ibid. 325, trans. T. Budke; cf. Hadot, I. 1969: 2f.). “In Seneca’s works themselves there is more pomp and grandiloquence about moral reflection than true solidity” (ibid. 292, trans. T. Budke). “In Seneca we find much that edifies, stimulates, and strengthens the mind—clever antitheses, rhetoric, and dialectic; but with these moral discourses we at the same time experience a certain feeling of coldness, a certain tedium” (Brown 2006: 279). Theodor Mommsen’s (1817–1903) statement, “Even in our age, the charming style of his writings still causes delight even though they are devoid of content” (2005: 191, trans. T. Budke), seems to be a distant echo of Hegel.

The well-known discussion about Seneca’s relationship to Christianity was continued on all sides around the middle of the 19th century. Against the attempt to hijack Seneca for Christianity, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), in the appendix [no. XVII] of his magnum opus *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841, 1848³), went into battle with a powerful antithesis of Christian and pagan ideas about the end of the world (ed. 1956: II 482–485). In contrast, the Protestant theologian Christian Ferdinand Baur (1792–1860), the archeget of the historical-critical history of dogma, explicated at length and hermeneutically a clear difference between Seneca’s thought and the Christian theology of St. Paul (Baur 1858; Fürst 2006: 103f.). The left Hegelian and critic of religion, Bruno Bauer (1809–1882), lapsed into the other extreme: in his work *Christus und die Cäsaren: Der Ursprung des Christentums aus dem griechischen Römertum* (1877), he proclaimed the figure of Jesus an invention by Mark the Evangelist and called Seneca the true founder of the original Christian religion. During the transition to the positions held by the Philosophy of life (“Lebensphilosophie”) Stoic rigor, of which Seneca was a representative, became controversial. While Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1866), whose writings show his wide reading of Seneca’s works, in 1848 reached a partly positive, ambivalent judgment of the entire Stoic philosophy (Neymeyr 2008a) in his main work *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1988: II 99–109; cf. III 163–175), one of his main recipients, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), dubbed the Stoics “complete morons” (“vollendete Hornochsen”, trans. T. Budke; 1984: Nachlaß W II 3, Nr. 11. KSA 13: 125) and Seneca in 1887 a “toreador of virtue” (1911: *The Twilight of the Idols*: 60). Nietzsche’s general distrust of Stoic ethics, which he considered hostile to life (Neymeyr 2008b), was explicitly directed against Seneca, leaving out neither the Roman’s rhetoric style nor his philosophical content (*Fröhliche Wissenschaft*. 1984: KSA 3: 360f.).

Even though Karl Marx (1818–1883) quoted Seneca in his doctoral thesis “Über Differenzen der demokritischen und epikureischen Naturphilosophie” (1841: I 266 f.) only *en passant*, some later Marxist-Leninist thinkers worked hard to force Seneca into the period framework of historical materialism (Schmidt 1960; Ley 1966: 450–457; Schmidt 1973; Seidel 1984: 159–162; Wollgast 1988: 760 f.). In the meantime, historians of philosophy had begun contributing to a rehabilitation of Seneca. To Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) belongs the honor of having rediscovered neo-Stoicism and the important role Seneca played in this movement, as presented in his study *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation* (Dilthey 1914: 274–276, 443–452).

In 20th-century German philosophy, notable references to Seneca can be found in existential ontology and in positions critically reflecting it. Martin Heidegger (1889–1973) illustrated the existential-ontological analysis of care (*cura*) with a long quotation from Seneca (*epist.* 124.14), found in § 42 of his magnum opus *Sein und Zeit* (1927: 199). Hans Blumenberg (1920–1996) saw in the criticism of theoretical curiosity (*curiositas*) the aporia of Stoic philosophy “possibly most clearly”: to communicate the quest for knowledge as a teleologically inherent disposition of man together with a skeptical resignation necessary to prevent one from being drawn into the virtue-threatening infinity of curiosity (Blumenberg 1966: 299–301). Seneca and aporia? Where to go from there?

10. SENECA IN THE PRESENT—A NEW ICON OF *ARS VIVENDI*?

The Seneca renaissance we are experiencing today had to take the long road via painstaking and detailed analyses of classical philology and the history of ancient religions at the end of the 19th century. Paul Rabbow (1867–1956), a pupil of the classical philologist Franz Buecheler (1837–1908), and the historian of religion Hermann Usener (1834–1905), presented groundbreaking studies on the ancient practices of self-shaping, in which the “care for oneself” (*epiméleia heautoū*) performs methodically controlled activities in order to treat affects and disarm misfortunes such as death through anticipation and preparation (Rabbow 1914). In Rabbow’s work *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike* (1954), Seneca is the chief witness for the existence of a sophisticated repertoire of methods and measures, provided by pagan antiquity within the framework of autosoteric teachings regarding salvation, which, after hetero- or theosoteric reshaping (Seckler 2000) have lived on to the present day in the spiritual exercises of Christianity (cf. esp. the *Exercitia*

spiritualia [1548] by Ignatius of Loyola). Rabbow's analyses were later and with much vigor taken up by Ilsetraut Hadot (*1930) and Pierre Hadot (1922–2010). Michel Foucault (1926–1984), who incorporated results gained by Hadot and Hadot in his main work *Le souci de soi* (1984; English trans. 1986: *The Care of the Self*), found widespread resonance in the intensive current discussions about the applications and meaning the ancient art of living can have for the present (Veyne 1993b; Schmidt 1996; Horn 1998, 2000, 2007).

As a real transformation of Seneca's philosophizing in the sense of providing concrete help in everyday life not by recurring to divine revelation and grace but by making use of the insight and the freedom of the client (not: patient!) one must consider *Philosophical Coaching* (Achenbach 1984, 2010; Marquard 1989; Achenbach). Clinical psychology, especially Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), is directly connected to the ancient psychagogic knowledge contained in Seneca's works (Hoellen 1986, 1987; Wiener 2008, 2009). Seneca is back in (the) practice! And in the same way he was mined for mirrors of princes in days past, he is now undergoing the same treatment for the ethics of the elite leaders within a modern mercantile society, demonstrated by, for example, Georg Schoeck's (*1924) bilingual florilegium *Seneca für Manager*, with 40,000 printed copies a book that has attained wide circulation (Schoeck 1970).

Seneca's intellectual power is currently radiating far beyond the realms of specialized philosophy. Several important national literatures of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century are offering clear and intensive direct references to and transformations of Senecan Stoicism (see Pauly 2008a). Fernando Pessoa (1888–1935) invented the stoicising authors "Ricardo Reis" and the "Baron of Teive" as proclaimers of their worldviews (see Pauly 2008a: 1214–1222). Regarding German national literature, Th. Ziolkowski used the title *Seneca—A New German Icon?*, referring to the immense growth and spread of an interest in Seneca prevalent in German culture since 1965, the 2,000th anniversary of his death. Günter Grass (*1927) portrayed—in his novel "örtlich betäubt," published in 1969—the *Studienrat* Eberhard Starusch as someone who is fed up with politics and deeply influenced by Stoicism (see Pauly 2008a: 1243–1250). Those authors who experienced the repressive political and cultural conditions of the former GDR were highly interested in Seneca. The year 1977 saw the premiere of Peter Hacks's (1928–2003) play *Senecas Tod* (Riedel 2000: 346–352). Seneca's dignity during a time of political disaster was also the subject of Heiner Müller's (1927–1995) poem "Senecas Tod," composed in 1993 (ed. Hörningh 1998: I 250f.). For the Büchner award winner Durs Grünbein (*1962), Seneca—notwithstanding all qualifying skepticism—might be called the leading intellectual reference point; he

dedicated his long poem “An Seneca: Postskriptum” (Grünbein 2004: 9–15) to the man who is unquestionably his favorite writer, and translated Seneca’s tragedy *Thyestes* (Grünbein 2006). “The thoughts of Seneca can be encountered virtually everywhere in Grünbein’s poetry and prose” (Pauly 2008a: 1252). With his poem “Sand oder Kalk” (Seidensticker and Grünbein 2002: 170f.), Grünbein took part in the debate about Seneca’s style and credibility. The title of a collection of essays written by Grünbein marks at the same time a substantial feature of some new literary horizons of the modern age: *Antike Dispositionen* (Grünbein 2005).

Looking back at the reception of Seneca’s oeuvre—a reception full of twists and turns—one can say with certainty that every age to come will create its own personal Seneca. If we can trust in Seneca’s words, he would surely have been happy about successful transformations and transfigurations (cf. *epist.* 6.1) that have the power to advance the development of one’s own personality: *Hoc ipse quoque facio: ex pluribus, quae legi, aliquid adprehendo* (*epist.* 2.5).

SENECA THE DRAMATIST*

Werner Schubert

Although there is no evidence that Seneca's tragedies were performed in antiquity, there are many traces that indicate that the texts as such were generally known, read, and cited from Seneca's lifetime onwards. The reception of his work, however, has varied. The remarkable revival of Seneca between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century was followed by a decline in the eighteenth century; in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the interest in Seneca's tragedies began to increase again, at least among scholars (Seidensticker and Armstrong 1985). Only in the past few decades have Seneca's tragedies made an appearance on the stage,¹—not in Latin, except for performances at schools and universities—but translated into modern languages and adapted to modern theatrical traditions.²

ANTIQUITY

As far as we can judge, Lucan, Seneca's nephew, had certain passages of his uncle's tragedies in mind when he wrote his (uncompleted) epic *Pharsalia*. Valerius Flaccus's characterization of tyrants as well as the shadowy portrait of Medea in his epic *Argonautica* is indebted to Seneca, too, while Statius's *Thebaid* is influenced both by the epic of his friend Lucan and Seneca's tragedies, especially by *Phoenissae* and *Oedipus*. Concerning the crucial *Troiae Halosis* and the *Bellum civile*, which are both poetic fragments "composed" by the poetaster Eumolpus in Petronius's *Satyrica*, at least the former poem may be a parody of Senecan monologues.

* Special thanks to Bettina Furley and Benedict Beckeld who read and emended my paper very carefully. This chapter owes a lot to the comprehensive studies concerning Seneca's influence on the European drama by P.L. Schmidt, H.J. Tschiedel, K.A. Blüher, Chr. Wanke, B. Asmuth, R. Borgmeier, G. Dahlberg, W.-L. Liebermann, and W. Busch in Lefèvre 1978b, as well as to Trillitzsch 1978, and to the contributions in Billerbeck and Schmidt 2004. Cf. also the particular chapters on Seneca's tragedies in this book.

¹ See the list of performances of Senecan tragedies from 1993 to 2007 by K. Kagerer and W. Stroh (http://www.lrz.de/~stroh/schriften/seneca_scaenicus.html).

² Cf. also the section "The Present" in this article, *infra*, pp. 92 f.

The most considerable signs of a more or less contemporary influence are to be seen in the *Corpus Senecanum* itself. As far as we know today, the tragedies *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus* do not originate from Seneca himself, but are strictly shaped, by unknown poets, according to the structure of the genuine Senecan dramas. The language and style of these two tragedies, however, are identical to the language and style of the others; that is why the discussion of whether these two tragedies are genuine has not yet ceased. *Hercules Oetaeus* is by far the longest tragedy in the *Corpus Senecanum* and thus in ancient Latin literature. It contains many resemblances to *Hercules furens*; the unknown author of *Hercules Oetaeus* entered an intertextual dialogue between himself and Seneca concerning the identical subject of the two works. In the *Octavia* we note the same dramatic technique as in the other tragedies. Moreover, the obvious “prince’s mirror” parts are doubtlessly influenced by the earlier Senecan dramas.

Seneca’s tragedies were, then, starting from Lucan and Petronius, both imitated and criticized, but nonetheless read and transmitted throughout the Roman world. Seneca’s choruses, being very innovative, influenced ancient authors from Caesius Bassus († 79) to Boethius († 524). Quintilian recalls in his *Institutio oratoria* that when still a student he heard a Senecan *praefatio* to one of his tragedies. In 9.2.9 he quotes Sen. *Med.* 453; in 10.1.125–131, however, he gives his judgment on Seneca’s prose writings rather than on his poems. Pushed back because of classicistic and archaic tendencies, Seneca was to be rediscovered only some centuries later, starting about AD 370. One of the strangest adaptations of a Senecan drama in late antiquity is Hosidius Geta’s *Medea*, an odd cento of Vergilian fragments. The play is no boring l’art pour l’art exercise of style, but a very demanding discussion of different traditions through its deconstruction and reconstruction of both Vergil and Seneca (cf. Schmidt 1978: 37 f.).

At this time “Seneca tragicus” and “Seneca philosophus” were wrongly regarded as two different persons. The following authors often refer to Seneca’s tragedies: Claudianus (Zwierlein 1984: 7–12; 46–57), Prudentius, Orientius (and the anonymous comedy *Querolus*), Sidonius Apollinaris, Avitus, Dracontius, Ennodius, and Boethius (Trillitzsch 1978: 121 f.). Whether Augustine ever read Senecan tragedies we do not know; his few citations may just as well have been taken from anthologies, grammars, or somewhere else. As to the poets among the listed authors, we can assume that they knew the one or the other Senecan tragedy very well. Hieronymus evidently made use of some verses taken from Seneca’s *Troades* when he wrote his *Vita Malchi*. The Senecan prologues or choral parts with their more general concern with philosophy or mythology inspired a special interest among the authors of

the early Christian period. In his *Cathemerinon* 10, Prudentius seems to have had in mind Sen. Tro. 371ff. (cf. Schmidt 1978: 50). Prudentius not only made use of isolated Senecan expressions, but integrated entire scenes into his poems. The same can be said of Claudianus or Ausonius, whose knowledge of Senecan tragedies reflects the literary education especially in Gaul, both of the poets and the reading public. At the end of antiquity, the metrical patterns as well as the philosophical views in the inserted poems in Boethius's *Consolatio philosophiae* resemble Senecan (or Pseudo-Senecan) choral parts. Schmidt (1978: 54) has pointed out that the Senecan tragedies at this time and in the Middle Ages were regarded as mere literary dramas. They formed part of the rhetorical education from the fourth century onward. During the last period of ancient poetry, at least for Claudianus, Prudentius, and Boethius, the gap between Vergilian classicism and Senecan modernism no longer existed.

MIDDLE AGES

Interest in Seneca's tragedies seems to have decreased during late antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages, triggered perhaps by Boethius, who in his *Consolatio* substituted the Senecan choruses with his *carmina* as patterns to be imitated by later poets (cf. Schmidt 1978: 62). As to the textual tradition at this time, we can discern only one palimpsest (5th–7th century). To Isidore of Sevilla (560–636) Seneca seems to have been unknown; only Aldhelm of Malmesbury (640–709) quotes two verses from Seneca's *Agamemnon*, naming the author explicitly. Perhaps Aldhelm had access to a complete codex of Seneca's tragedies.

During the Carolingian Renaissance there are reminiscences of *Herc. O.* in Theodulf of Orléans (750–821). At the beginning of the tenth century there is evidence of Eugenius Vulgaris's knowledge of Seneca in southern Italy. Subsequently also in northern Italy some literary documents show traces of knowledge of Seneca; Liutprant of Cremona (ca. 920–972) in his *Antapodosis* had Sen. *Phaedr.* 749–752 in mind. In the eleventh century, in which the highly important *Codex Etruscus* was written, knowledge of Seneca's tragedies seems to have increased steadily. In the Lexicon of Papias (cf. Trillitzsch 1978: 126), *Hercules furens* is called the "*prima tragoedia*"; cf. also Petrus Damiani (1007–1072) in *De sancta simplicitate*. In the twelfth century, Seneca's tragedies were clearly read in schools. The most important documents stem from France (Zwierlein 1987). In the middle of the thirteenth century, Richardus de Fournival (see Trillitzsch 1978: 127) lists the ten tragedies of Seneca, including

Octavia, in the same order as in the MSS of group A. His contemporary, Vincent of Beauvais († 1264), frequently cites Seneca in his *Speculum maius*.

We do not know if these authors really knew Seneca's tragedies, or if they used anthologies and other secondary sources. Trillitzsch (1978: 128f.) points out that "insgesamt die wirkliche Lektüre der Senecatragödien im Mittelalter selten [ist], woran auch die spätere gelegentliche Aufnahme unter die Schul- und Sentenzautoren nicht viel ändert."³ It is important to note that there is no evidence that Seneca's tragedies ever inspired the medieval drama. It is not until the Renaissance that a productive adaptation of Seneca's tragedies is perceptible. As to the question of what Seneca's tragedies in the Middle Ages were used for, Schmidt (1978: 72) suggests: "In den Helden der Handlung sieht das Hohe Mittelalter Vorbilder und abschreckende Beispiele, und noch direkter nehmen sich in der mittelalterlichen Rezeption [...] etwa der 'Thyest' oder die 'Octavia' als politisch-philosophische Lehrstücke, als Fürstenspiegel aus."⁴

RENAISSANCE (13TH/14TH–16TH CENTURY)⁵

It is during the Renaissance that Seneca's tragedies were discovered as poetry (cf. Pastore-Stocchi 1964). This is attested by the great number of manuscripts that were written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The commentaries of Nicolas Trevet(h) played a most important role in this process.⁶ And here for the first time Seneca's tragedies served as patterns for new tragedies, first in Latin, later in other languages. This was the birth of the European tragedy, long before the Greek tragedy was rediscovered and reevaluated. The process was initiated in Italy by the so-called Paduan pre-humanists. Their compendia show that they disposed of the whole corpus of Seneca's tragedies, which, in the beginning, were treated as the

³ "[...] all in all, actual reading of Seneca's tragedies [is] rare in the Middle Ages, which is not changed much by the occasional inclusion in textbooks and collections of aphorisms in later times."

⁴ "The High Middle Ages sees both role models and cautionary examples in the heroes of the drama, and even more directly in the medieval reception [...] are plays like the 'Thyestes' or the 'Octavia' exemplified as politico-philosophical pieces, as mirrors of princes."

⁵ For Seneca in the Renaissance and Baroque, see especially Boyle 1997: 141–207.

⁶ While Trevet's (or Mussato's) works have met with much scholarly interest in recent years (for Trevet cf., e.g., Junge 1999; Marchitelli 1999; Marchitelli 2000; for Mussato cf. MacGregor 1980), many other 14th/15th-century commentaries on Seneca are still widely unnoticed as K. Hafemann observes in her edition of the commentary on Seneca's *Hercules furens* by Iohannes de Segarellis (before 1400) (Hafemann 2003).

philosophical texts of a pagan poet who had supposedly corresponded with Paulus the Apostle and whose thinking was close to Christianity. Perhaps Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) knew Seneca's tragedies only from anthologies, but Boccaccio (1313–1375) obviously *did* know the texts; some chapters from the first book of *De casibus virorum illustrium* render tragic plots based on or influenced by Seneca. Lovato de' Lovati (1241–1309) discovered the hitherto unknown *Codex Etruscus*, which differs in many ways from the manuscripts of group A. On the one hand, it does not include *Octavia*; on the other hand, there is a kind of introduction, a "notamentum" containing a definition of what a tragic poet should be; the verses and meters of the tragedies are explained, too. Hence the texts were no longer regarded as philosophical treatises, but as tragic poems. And it was perhaps Lovato de' Lovati's influence that inspired his friend Albertino Mussato (1261–1329) to write the first (known) tragedy since antiquity: *Ecerinis* (Braden 1985: 99–114; Boyle 1997: 141). The title shows an affinity to those of ancient epics (like Vergil's *Aeneis* or Statius's *Thebais*) and to some of Seneca's tragedies in the A-tradition (*Thebais* or *Troas*).⁷ As a matter of fact, the plot, which covers many years, is more epic than dramatic; it is based on a rather cruel story which had taken place not in mythic times, but only a century before the *Ecerinis* was written; the influence of Seneca is to be seen mainly in the structure (five acts, separated by choruses), the wide range of different meters, and the stock of typical scenes we know from Seneca. The language and style are, of course, the same as Seneca's; as to the scope, it is Senecan as well: it is, as Tschiedel (1978: 83) has pointed out, "die ständig wiederkehrende Vorstellung eines Tyrannen von exzessiver Willkür und Grausamkeit, dessen Untaten keinem anderen Zweck als der Befriedigung der eigenen Natur dienen."⁸ According to medieval practice this tragedy was never performed, but only recited. Mussato's opus remained unrivalled for a long time. Among his successors, only Gregorio Corrarò (1411–1464) chose a plot that is very close to Seneca's for his *Progne*, which allowed him to imitate this prototype in many ways, as he himself explains: "*Imitatur in hac tragoedia Senecam in Thyeste; ut ibi Tantalus ab inferis veniens introducitur, ita hic Diomedes Thrax Tyrannus.*"⁹ Corrarò also adapted the typically Senecan *domina-nutrix* scenes, which thenceforth belonged to the most important elements of

⁷ I am grateful to Andreas Heil for pointing this out.

⁸ "[...] the ever recurring idea of a tyrant of excessive despotism and cruelty whose misdeeds serve no other purpose but the satisfaction of his own nature."

⁹ "In this tragedy, I imitate Seneca's *Thyestes*; as Tantalus is introduced coming from the underworld there, so the tyrant Diomedes Thrax here" (Latin quoted in Tschiedel 1978: 85).

Italian tragedy. The cruel details of the plot were willingly imitated—and exaggerated—by other tragedians. Even these plays were only read or recited. It was not until the end of the fifteenth century that the so-called Roman Academy, under its leader Pomponius Laetus (1428–1497), endeavored to bring to the stage the comedies of Plautus and Terence—and the tragedies of Seneca. The time for the Greek tragedy had not yet come. It was the kinship of Latin and Italian that fostered the prevalence of the ancient Latin dramas and perhaps also the bloodthirstiness and shocking effects in the action, the lapidary shortness of sentences, and the diction. Hence the term “Senecismo”!

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the first attempts were made to write dramas in the vernacular, by which the Aristotelian aims of *eleos* and *phobos* could be better attained than by retaining the use of Latin. This change required the use of new meters and verses. The poet Giangiorgio Trissino (1478–1550) successfully introduced the “endecasillabi sciolti” for the dialogue scenes and the “canzoni” for the choruses. His *Sofonisba* is based on Senecan models; influences from Euripides and Sophocles are already perceptible, but they are nothing more than ornaments. The drama itself is “Roman.” And it is this Romanness that fits into Renaissance thinking with its accentuation of man’s free will and responsibility. The *Sofonisba* was never performed; it was Giovambattista Giraldi’s (1504–1573) tragedy *Orbecche* (1541) whose fame spread throughout Italy and Europe and thus proved to be the beginning of modern tragedy (Braden 1985: 115–124).¹⁰ The play is based on one of Giraldi’s own novels and on Seneca’s *Thyestes* (Boyle 1997: 150 f.).

Tschiedel (1978: 104) has pointed out that the obvious influence of the Italian novel was caused by the close relationship between the novel and Senecan tragedy itself: compared with Greek tragedy, Seneca had no longer treated the myths as stories telling of gods and men, but as pointed actions full of unexpected turns caused by men’s passionate reactions. The special predilection for exotic places is also to be seen in Seneca’s tragedies, especially in the enumeration of unknown, sonorous names and places. In the same way as Seneca used myths with their distant persons and places to mirror his contemporary world, the authors of Italian tragedy could hide their political messages, if there were any, in an “exotic” disguise. The *Octavia*, whether Senecan or not, with its unequal pair consisting of a tyrant and a wise counselor, precipitated a flow of Renaissance dramas. Seneca’s

¹⁰ On the general influence of Seneca on Giraldi, see Dondoni 1964.

dramatic technique became omnipresent, although the plots and motifs were increasingly taken from elsewhere, as for example from Ovid in Sperone Speroni's (1500–1588) *Canace*, from Livy in Pietro Aretino's (1492–1556) *Orazia*, or from Vergil in Ludovico Dolce's (1508–1568) *Didone*. Nevertheless, Torquato Tasso's (1544–1595) not very successful tragedy *Il re Torrismondo* owes a lot to Seneca's *Oedipus*.

While there are no traces of knowledge of the Senecan oeuvre in Spain during the Middle Ages, the reception of Seneca's tragedies in the Renaissance started with editions and translations (into Castilian as well as Catalanian) at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The school theater and the tradition of spiritual plays were dominated by the activities of the humanists. In 1543 Francisco Satorres published his tragedy *Delphinus*, which was influenced by Seneca. In the so-called Jesuit dramas, which were partly written in the vernacular, we observe the well-known Senecan disposition of a tragedy in five acts separated by choruses. In the dramas of the second half of the sixteenth century, which are most important concerning the development of the Spanish theater, Seneca's influence, mediated by Italian tragedy, also is demonstrated by the predilection for mythology and history. Cruel tyrants (see MacCurdy 1964) are an important tragic theme in Spain as elsewhere in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Positive characters are rare and mostly embodied by women; ghostly apparitions, foreshadowing dreams, and evil omens belong to the stock scenes; choruses are mainly to be found in plays with a strong classicist attitude.¹¹

Similar things can be said of French tragedies. The beginnings are to be seen in the liturgical and sacred dramas of the Middle Ages, which were written very early in the vernacular. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the revival of ancient tragedy in France began. George Buchanan (1506–1582) wrote Latin plays, influenced by Euripides and Seneca, on biblical themes. Marc-Antoine Muret (1526–1585) was the first who chose a non-biblical subject when he wrote his *Julius Caesar* (Braden 1985: 124–129) in Latin. This tragedy is Senecan in structure, plot, and diction with its “adhortationes,” “altercationes,” and stichomyths. But there is at least one deviation from the Senecan tradition that was praised by his contemporaries: instead of a “nuntius” who reports the horrible slaughter of Caesar, it is Brutus himself, one of the main characters, who exults in having executed the murder (see Wanke 1978: 183).

¹¹ For Seneca in Spain, see especially Blüher 1969 and Blüher 1978.

The first French tragedy was Etienne Jodelle's (1532–1573) *Cléopâtre Captive* (1552), based on Plutarch but modeled on Seneca. Among the first French tragedies in which Senecan plots were adapted was Jean de la Péruse's (1529–1554) *Médée* (1553), which proved to be the starting point for an overwhelming and constant flow of Medea dramas. There are, though, important differences between Seneca's *Medea* and de la Péruse's *Médée* in the disposition, the diction, and the length of the respective dramas. Robert Garnier (1545–1590) wrote eight tragedies between 1568 and 1583; three of them are based on Senecan tragedies: *Hippolyte*, *La Troade*, and *Antigone*. Garnier often mingles scenes from different dramas into one. Seneca's short sentences are extended by learned comparisons. In creating word play he emulates or even surpasses Seneca. It was Garnier whom the French poets of the seventeenth century had in mind when they began to shape dramas in the Senecan mold.

In England, the Netherlands, Germany, and Northern Europe, Seneca's *Nachleben* was quite different from that in the Romanic tradition. To begin with Scandinavia, there are but few traces of Senecan knowledge before the middle of the seventeenth century (see Dahlberg 1978). During the Reformation, scholars put all their efforts into the demands of religious developments. Thus, Renaissance thinking lost its influence in Scandinavia. Seneca's tragedies seem to have been neither read in schools nor performed on stage. Scant traces of Senecan reception in Denmark are to be seen in the Latin play *Susanna* by Sixt Birck (1537), which contains allusions to Seneca's *Phaedra*. The knowledge of Seneca's tragedies, however, seems to have been mediated only by anthologies; there is generally a special inclination to proverbs and sentences in sixteenth-century school drama in Denmark. In Sweden Seneca played a more important role than in the other Scandinavian countries. The first Swedish tragedy was Urban Hjärne's adaptation of Jacob van Zevecote's Latin drama *Rosimunda*, written in the 1660s, in which the Dutch humanist and poet made use of his knowledge of Seneca's tragedies. Remarkable are the two redactions of Seneca's *Phaedra* and *Troades* (*Hippolitus* and *Troas*), which were performed, and possibly written, by members of the first permanent Swedish theater company, Dän Swänska Theatren, at the end of the seventeenth century.

In the Netherlands¹² Seneca was already known in the Middle Ages; in the Renaissance his influence was augmented by Rudolf Agricola (1444–1485) and, still more, by Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466 [1469?]-1536), who,

¹² See Asmuth 1978.

incidentally, still thought Seneca the philosopher to be the father or the brother of the poet. And it was Seneca the philosopher who exerted his influence on thinking and writing at the beginning of neo-Stoicism. But Seneca's tragedies, though read and well known, did not serve as examples for school dramas, while Terence's comedies did. It was not until the 1580s that Seneca the tragedian was revived in the Netherlands, according to the "europäische Großwetterlage des aufkommenden Manierismus"¹³ (Asmuth 1978: 240). In 1600 Jacob Duym (ca. 1547–ca. 1606) for the first time translated a complete Senecan tragedy (*Troades*) into Dutch: *Den Spiegel des Hoochmoets Wesende Troiades*. The neo-Latin dramas of the neo-Stoics, not only in the Netherlands but also in Germany, were based on biblical plots, but shaped on Senecan models. "Mit der Figur des positiven, stoische Apathie verkörpernden Helden verwirklichen sie auf der Bühne, was Seneca als Lehre aus seinen grauenvollen Theaterstücken und als Gegensatz zu ihnen im Leben verwirklicht wissen möchte" (Asmuth 1978: 247).¹⁴

In Germany,¹⁵ too, the revival of antique drama started with comedy. In the time of humanism the reception of Senecan tragedies was fostered not only by the efforts of Erasmus, but also of Konrad Celtis (1459–1508), the first German "poeta laureatus." He was a pupil of the above-mentioned Pomponius Laetus, and he was the first to stage antique comedies in Vienna. Some years before, he had given lectures on Seneca's tragedies in Leipzig; he had also planned an edition that, however, was only partially finished (*Hercules furens* and *Thyestes*). In his preface Celtis compares the ten tragedies with the Ten Commandments.

On German stages the spiritual plays and the "Fastnachtsspiele" were still popular, but gradually other influences became apparent. The dramatists of that time, however, who were certainly acquainted with pagan and Christian Latin tragedies, did not yet follow Seneca. As Liebermann (1978: 384) notes: "Senecas Figuren sind grundsätzlich autonom, und nur in der schuldhaften, selbst zu verantwortenden Preisgabe dieser Autonomie lassen sie sich von fremden Mächten beherrschen—wovon sie in Selbstanalyse und Selbstaussprache höchst bewußt Rechenschaft geben. Die Heteronomie der Menschen des 16. Jahrhunderts dagegen ist konstitutionell und in diesem Verstande wertfrei."¹⁶ Seneca's tragedies served mainly as a

¹³ "the general apparition of mannerism in Europe".

¹⁴ "Through the character of the positive and stoically disinterested hero, they realize on stage the teaching that Seneca sought to realize in life through the horror of his plays."

¹⁵ See Liebermann 1978.

¹⁶ "Seneca's characters are in general autonomous, and only in case of the loss of this

repertory of pointed sentences; if ancient plays had an influence on dramatic writing at all, it was through Terence's comedies.

As for England,¹⁷ from 1559 to 1581 Seneca's tragedies appeared one by one in English translations by several authors. They were finally edited by Thomas Newton as *The Tenne Tragedies*, which remained the sole complete English translation up to the twentieth century. Seneca was regarded as the representative of ancient tragedy; Greek drama was hardly known to anybody at this time. But this high reputation was a theoretical one; there are no traces of Senecan influence based on the texts of the tragedies as such; perhaps most Senecan reminiscences were mediated by anthologies or excerpts. *The Tenne Tragedies* reveal different translation techniques. Dark allusions to mythology in the original plays are replaced by contemporary images; enigmatic antonomasies are substituted by their "solutions"; the iambic trimeter is dispensed with in favor of the iambic septenar. Alliterations are very common and even more frequently used than in the Latin texts.

The first regular English tragedy, *Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex* (1561/62) by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, was already influenced by Senecan elements in plot and structure (Bacquet 1964). Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (first performance between 1582 and 1592) was very important for Elizabethan drama, because here for the first time tragedy entered the domain of folk play (Habicht 1964). The plot is as alien from Seneca as from Elizabethan spectators. But the stock of characters and of typical scenes is strongly influenced by Seneca.

As for Slavic literature,¹⁸ in Poland there was a remarkable interest in Seneca from the fifteenth century onward. As early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, there were editions. From 1589 onward there were also translations of Senecan tragedies. The Societas Jesu had an important influence on Polish intellectual life. In other east and southeast European countries, the performance of a Senecan play can be documented here and there. In 1573 the *Thyestes* was performed in Olmütz/Olomouc (Moravia). In Ragusa, now Dubrovnik, Giacomo Bona composed his *Herculis labores et gesta in Christi figuram* (1513), which shows a Senecan influence.

autonomy, due to their own fault, do they let themselves be controlled by other forces—for which they consciously account through self-analysis and monologue. The heteronomy of sixteenth-century people, in contrast, is fundamentally and in the thought of this age non-judgemental."

¹⁷ See especially Borgmeier 1978; Braden 1985: 153–223; and Boyle 1997.

¹⁸ See Busch 1978.

BAROQUE PERIOD (17TH CENTURY)

The seventeenth century is perhaps the most “Senecan” period in the history of European theater. In Italy the development of stage plays had already climaxed in the sixteenth century. Lyric elements increasingly pervaded dramatic poetry. Thus, the interest in Seneca’s tragedies shifted from the dialogues and monologues, where iambic meters usually prevail, to the choruses, which were written in lyric meters. No wonder that music began to play an increasingly large role on stage. This development culminated in the birth of a new genre: the opera.

The plots of the first operas stemmed from antiquity. It was, however, not the ancient drama itself that was responsible for this development, but the bucolic world with singing nymphs and shepherds and with mythological figures, like Daphne or Orpheus, depicted therein. It is remarkable that the texts of these musical dramas, later called “libretti,” had much in common with Senecan drama in their (sometimes schematic) structure, the importance of choral parts, and the predilection for “monologues,” or better, monodies (Schubert 2004: 378–387). Senecan influence is also perceptible in the growing importance of the theme “fickleness of luck.”

Not only classical mythology, but also ancient history served as thematic and textual sources. One of Claudio Monteverdi’s (1567–1643) three great operas, which have survived, is based on ancient history: *L’incoronazione di Poppea*. In this opera Seneca himself appears on stage; he is the Stoic philosopher and teacher of Nero, who, enslaved to his mistress, compels his teacher to commit suicide (Manuwald 2008: 134–138). The libretto is based, as Manuwald (2005a) demonstrates, and as had been assumed by other scholars, on passages from Tacitus’s *Annals* and from *Octavia*, the only existing ancient *fabula praetexta*, which at this time was still believed to have been written by Seneca himself.¹⁹

In France the Senecan tradition, which started in the sixteenth century, remains today. In the early seventeenth century, both Senecan (or pseudo-Senecan) *Hercules* dramas were adapted by Prévost (1614), de Mainfray (1616), and Rotrou (1634); La Pinelière followed them with his version of *Phaedra* (1635). In these adaptations, the Senecan choral parts were modified and partly transformed into dialogues. The main representatives of French tragedy in the seventeenth century were Pierre Corneille (1606–1684)²⁰

¹⁹ For other operas with Nero and Octavia as protagonists, see Manuwald 2005b.

²⁰ For Seneca’s influence on Corneille, see Wanke 1964; Braden 1985: 134–152.

and Jean Racine (1639–1699).²¹ Some of their dramas are, at least in part, more Senecan than their authors were willing to concede, as far as we can conclude from their commentaries, introductions, and letters concerning, say, Corneille's *Médée* (1635, cf. Stegmann 1964) or Racine's *Phèdre et Hippolyte* (1677).

In *Médée* there are long passages not only influenced by but also taken (and, of course, translated) from the Senecan tragedy. The main plot itself is enriched by an underplot, which, as in some operas of that time, contains elements of comedy. Thus, the action is far more complicated than in Seneca's tragedies, but the logic of the development leading to the final catastrophe is sometimes more stringent. Not only *Médée* but also Corneille's other dramas reflect Seneca's style and his idea of man. Like Seneca, Corneille made use of two kinds of speech: passionate and ingenious. The structure of Corneille's tragedies follows Senecan patterns, although his monologues are not as numerous as in the ancient models. Instead, Corneille makes use of scenes containing conversations with confidant(e)s, especially in the dramatic expositions. The influence of Senecan thinking is to be seen in the fearlessness before death and in the importance of freedom of will. But Corneille differs from Seneca in his judging of human passions. While Seneca rejects them all, Corneille retains and justifies the "great passions," such as ambition and revenge.

Like Corneille, Racine downplayed Seneca's influence on his writing²² when he commented on his own dramas, although it is evident that Racine had in view Seneca's *Troades* and *Phaedra* when he wrote his *La Thébaïde* and his *Phèdre et Hippolyte*.²³ It was obsolete to refer to Seneca at this time, as Wanke (1978: 207) has pointed out. There are also reminiscences of Seneca's *Medea* in the vision of hell in the jealousy scene in *Phèdre et Hippolyte*. As in Corneille's tragedies, there are, however, some differences from the Latin author. In *Phèdre et Hippolyte* the plot is enriched by Hippolyte's love for Aricie. The bloody details after the death of Hippolyte are softened in the French tragedy, which, as a whole, had an enormous effect on contemporary writing. One hundred and thirty years later, no less a poet than Schiller translated the tragedy into German.

²¹ For Seneca's influence on Racine cf. Wanke 1978: 207–220; Zwierlein 2006: 29–53.

²² Lapp's study (1964) carefully analyzes the features that both poets have in common and those in which they differ.

²³ According to Boyle, "even after Racine the reworking of Seneca is apparent" (Boyle 1997: 152f.); cf. Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon's *Atrée et Thyeste*.

It was in the Netherlands²⁴ that the whole range of works by “Seneca the tragedian” and “Seneca the philosopher” was first regarded as a unity with the rise of neo-Stoicism in the mid-sixteenth century. In consequence of that development, the dramatists of “de gouden eeuw” (1580–1680) were well aware of the fact that Seneca was one of the most prominent mediators between ancient and modern stoicism. Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), who, with his *De constantia* (1584), had prepared the ground for the influence of neo-Stoicism, fostered the renewed interest in Seneca as well as in Tacitus; Daniel Heinsius (1580–1655) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) followed him by writing Latin tragedies modeled on Senecan examples.

Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft (1581–1647) was the first to write Dutch dramas. He integrated passages taken from Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon* into his first tragedy *Achilles en Polyxena*. In his later tragedies, Hooft, like other poets, made use of Seneca’s typical scenes, and it was Hooft who revalorized the magic scenes and ghost apparitions, reflecting the superstition of his time, when the prosecution of witches had reached its climax. It is, however, interesting that Seneca’s influence is not so great in Hooft’s tragedies based on ancient plays and plots as in his historical tragedies; the recourse to ancient models generally served to justify modern dramatic production. Contrary to the Senecan models are Hooft’s apotheotic finali, in which the bellicose actions lead up to visions of calm and peace that can be realized *hic et nunc*. Asmuth (1978: 260) recapitulates the importance of Hooft’s adaptation of Seneca as follows: “Aus Senecas antiker, im Mythisch-Kultischen wurzelnder und von stoischen Maximen gerahmter Tragödie hat Hooft eine vaterländische Staatstragödie geformt.”²⁵

Some authors in the Netherlands also catered to the spectators’ lust for cruel and bloody actions to which, above all, Seneca’s *Thyestes* served as a model, for example, Samuel Coster’s (1579–1665) *Ithys*. Jan Vos’s (ca. 1620–1667) *Aran en Titus, of Wraak en Weerwraak* seems to be a combination of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and Senecan tragedy. Guiliam van Nieuwe-landt’s (1585–1635) *Nero*, in which the author portrayed Nero’s most gruesome crimes, is a still more atrocious example.

One of the most famous Dutch poets is the prolific dramatist Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679). When Vondel began to write, perform, and publish his tragedies, the Senecan influence may have been mediated by others. After he

²⁴ Cf. Stachel 1907: 137–179; Asmuth 1978.

²⁵ “Out of Seneca’s ancient tragedy, rooted in myth and ritual and framed by stoic maxims, Hooft created a patriotic national tragedy.” Cf. also Rombauts 1964 and Smit 1964.

had learned Latin, Vondel translated Seneca's tragedies from 1625 onwards; henceforth his plays are full of Senecan echoes. In the 1640s we can see a "change of paradigm" in Vondel's *oeuvre* after he had translated Sophocles' *Elektra* (1639). This new acquaintance with Greek tragedy was the beginning of the end of Seneca's influence on Dutch tragedy.

In Germany²⁶ the Senecan influence gradually grew toward the end of the sixteenth century, by way of contemporary French, Dutch, and English tragedy. During the Counter-Reformation, Jesuit drama, which aimed to appeal to its audience by every means of rhetorical persuasion and stagecraft, became very popular. The Protestant school drama also flourished in these times and nourished the beginnings of baroque drama. Seneca's revival in Germany took place at this time;²⁷ his tragedies were regarded as representative paradigms of human existence with a predilection for the tension between Stoic patience and imperturbability on the one hand, and tyrannical incalculability and cruelty on the other. In terms of the contemporary *Weltanschauung*, Seneca served as a Stoic paradigm in his way of thinking, living, and dying.

The poet Martin Opitz (1597–1639),²⁸ after he had finished his "Buch von der deutschen Poeterey" (1624), translated Seneca's *Troades* (Plard 1964a). This translation, however, is more extensive than the original text with meticulous periphrases and explanations for the readers and spectators who were not acquainted with ancient mythology, geography, or history. Opitz, incidentally, also translated Sophocles's *Antigone* (1636).

There are many difficulties in determining the boundaries between the immediate reception of Seneca's tragedies in Germany and those that were mediated through secondary sources. The outstanding dramatists of the seventeenth century were Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664; see Stachel 1907: 204–274; Plard 1964b) and Daniel Casper von Lohenstein (1635–1683; see Stachel 1907: 274–324; Lefebvre 1964). It was Schings who first demonstrated that Gryphius was influenced by patristic and Stoic traditions not only in a vague sense, but also in his intimate familiarity with the essential texts, especially with Seneca's writings (Schings 1966). It is evident from this time onward that the influence of Seneca the philosopher is inseparable from that of Seneca the tragedian. Incidentally, "Seneca" was used as a common

²⁶ See Stachel 1907: 30–136 and 180–350.

²⁷ "In den strukturbestimmenden Erscheinungen ist Seneca für die Barockdichter der kongeniale Partner" (Liebermann 1978: 391).

²⁸ See von Albrecht 2004: 197–202.

epitheton for both Gryphius and Lohenstein by their contemporaries. As in Seneca's tragedies, Gryphius' dramas represent the condition of the world we live in, and they try to offer an interpretation of it. In Seneca's tragedies, the cosmos is disturbed and distorted by man; the divine principles are thus invalidated. In Gryphius's plays, on the other hand, the divine order reigns above all; man has to carry his earthly burden, such as social inferiority or prosecution by enemies, with stoic patience. Gryphius mastered the wide range of Senecan stylistic elements, which was, after all, characteristic of his contemporary dramatists.

With Lohenstein the history of the political tragedy in Germany began. The ancient historian Tacitus became especially important. Lohenstein's rich and pointed style is influenced by Seneca as well as by Tacitus. The Age of Enlightenment had already begun to dawn, for in Lohenstein's tragedies reason gradually becomes the guiding principle, and this implies a new function of the learned allusions and metaphors taken from ancient models: "Diese 'Frostigkeit' diente ihm nicht anders als dem Archegeten des barocken Dramas Seneca dazu, das Überbordende und Maßlose reflektierend zu bändigen, in den Rang des vorab bereits gedeuteten Exemplarischen zu erheben und damit dem Leser und Zuschauer die weltbewältigende Distanz zu ermöglichen"²⁹ (Liebermann 1978: 424).

In Spain³⁰ Seneca's influence ceased in the seventeenth century when the new concept of the "comedia" spread throughout the country, fostered by the success of Lope de Vega's (1562–1635) plays, which followed neither Aristotelian rules nor Seneca's dramatic technique. But this is also the time when a Senecan tragedy was first translated into Spanish (*Troades*, by Gonzáles de Salas 1633). Some authors tried to adapt Seneca's dramas to the "comedia," like Francisco López de Zárate in his *Tragedia de Hércules Furente y Oeta* 1651. While Seneca the tragedian disappeared, Seneca the philosopher was rediscovered by his fellow "countrymen".

In England at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Seneca's influence continued to be felt among dramatists who adopted certain elements of his structure and style while taking their plots from elsewhere.

²⁹ "This 'frostiness' served him in the same way it had served the founding father of baroque drama, Seneca, to control the excessiveness and extremeness through reflection, to raise these to the status of a previously interpreted example, and in doing so to provide the reader and the audience with the detachment necessary to come to terms with the world."

³⁰ See Blüher 1969 and Blüher 1978.

William Shakespeare's³¹ early plays show an affinity for antique plots, mainly taken from history; these and other historical tragedies are often focused on tyrants and villains; Seneca's influence is to be seen or heard mainly in the diction and in the use of typical scenes, whereas an emancipation from Seneca can be seen in the lack of mythological subjects and the new functions of old dramatic elements. So the—at first sight typically Senecan—ghost apparitions are not put at the beginning of a tragedy as a kind of hors d'oeuvre, but are integrated into the dramatic action. Seneca's influence is more important in other regards: Shakespeare's later tragedies as well as those of his contemporaries reflect Seneca's stoicism. George Chapman (1559[?]-1634) combined the Senecan dramatic technique with the ideals of Stoic philosophy, thus being more Senecan than Seneca himself. Still more indebted to Seneca was John Marston (ca. 1575-1634; see Goldberg 2000: 218-221), who in his *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio's Revenge* not only followed Seneca in dramatic technique but also embedded quotations from Seneca's tragedies.³² At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Seneca's tragedies were regarded as classical models for modern tragedy, which, however, did not really influence writing for the stage, but fostered the writing of literary dramas. For the rest of the seventeenth century, Seneca's influence in England was by far weaker than on the continent.

As for Scandinavia, Seneca's influence was mainly felt in Sweden. In 1648 *Hercules furens* was possibly staged in the presence of Queen Christine. Neither in Denmark, Norway, nor in Iceland are there any remarkable traces of a creative adaptation or philological preoccupation with Seneca.

Regarding Slavic literature,³³ in Poland Seneca was popular in the so-called school drama (Gregor Cnapius, ca. 1564-1638), but there is no influence on genuine Polish drama. Jan Alan Bardzinski (1657-1708) translated Seneca's tragedies into Polish. As for Czech and Slovak literature we can only suppose that the Jesuits, at least, Karel Kolcava (1656-1717), for example, were influenced by Seneca. In Russia Seneca's influence was not yet apparent in the seventeenth century.

³¹ "And then there is Shakespeare, whose plays rewrite Senecan scenes and speeches constantly" (Boyle 1997: 147); cf. also Braden 1985: 153-223, Miola 1992, Goldberg 2000: 214-218; and Bullough 1964.

³² See Boyle 1997: 144 f. *The Spanish Tragedy* by Th. Kyd already contained several Latin quotations from Seneca (Boyle 1997: 143 f.).

³³ See Busch 1978.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

In the eighteenth century Seneca's decline, which had already begun in the seventeenth century, became evident. This fits into a general and well-known development of which the causes need not be explained here: Latin literature was abandoned in favor of Greek texts, which were considered the only original literary heritage from antiquity. Italian poets, though, still adhered to the Latin tradition. In Pietro Metastasio's dramas and libretti, for instance, which are still regarded as the best dramatic poetry of eighteenth-century Italy, we find several important elements of Senecan tragedy: the shortness and pointedness of the diction; the high estimation of ethical, especially Stoic, values; and the specific features of the so-called "prince's mirrors." In Italy, as in the whole of Europe, there was an intensified interchange between the Latin tradition and the new appraisal of Greek literature. The Italian dramatists, especially Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803), turned away from French influences, but Seneca, whose tragedies were translated anew, was still imitated in contemporary tragedies. The "tyrant" was a common figure on stage, not only in Italy, but also in France, if we think of Crébillon's *Atrée et Thyeste* (1707). Even more than before, Seneca's *Hercules* dramas served as models or inspiration for tragedies. This was certainly influenced by the broad interest in philosophical thinking connected with the development of the Age of Enlightenment. In Germany, eighteenth-century rationalism, among other things, caused reflections on speech. Baroque bombast was anathematized. But in the field of dramatic theory, Seneca's influence was still strong, especially on the development of the "Trauerspiel." In Germany³⁴ there was also a tendency to abandon the French examples of "antique" tragedies in favor of the Latin and Greek originals, as did Johann Elias Schlegel (1718–1749) in his *Hecuba* (1736), which was revised under the title *Die Trojanerinnen* in 1742. Schlegel made use of Euripides's *Troades* and *Hecabe* and of Seneca's *Troades*, creating his own version, not merely a patchwork. Some important exponents of that time show a shifting attitude toward Seneca: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (see Barner 1973), for instance, had defended Seneca against his modern adversaries in his early years, but later turned away from him in favor of Greek tragedy. Seneca's influence on Lessing's writing is immediately perceptible in his *Miss Sara Sampson* in which the cruel Lady Marwood characterizes herself as a new Medea. Christian Felix Weiße's (1726–1804) *Atreus und Thyest* (1766) is clearly influenced by Seneca's *Thyestes* (Dammann

³⁴ See Liebermann 1978.

2006). In the period of Sturm und Drang the dramatic pathos is comparable to Seneca's. It is, above all, the Senecan *Medea* that inspired certain poets, such as Friedrich Maximilian Klinger (1752–1831) and, very important for the Senecan reception in music, Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter (1746–1797) in his *Medea*, which is almost entirely a single monologue, spoken by Medea, full of Senecan echoes; the composer Georg Anton Benda (1722–1795) adapted it in his melodrama *Medea*. There are also Senecan elements in Schiller's *Die Braut von Messina*.

In Spain, eighteenth-century classicism did not seek inspiration in Seneca, but in French tragedy of the seventeenth century. In the Netherlands, tragedy followed the same development. Sometimes the figure of Seneca himself was presented on the Dutch stage. There are at least two tragedies entitled *De dood van Seneca* (by C.G. Moering 1743 and J.A. Backer 1796); the German prose tragedy *Seneca* by Ewald von Kleist (1758) was also translated twice into Dutch under the titles *De dood van Seneca* and *Seneka*. In England, Seneca's philosophical writing was still well known and read, but his influence on English drama was of no great importance. Greek tragedy gained more and more ground after John Dryden (1631–1700) made use of both Seneca and Euripides in his *Oedipus*. As for Poland, there are but few traces of a creative adaptation of Seneca's tragedies; in southeast European literature we find some plays with ancient mythological plots, but it is not confirmed that these were influenced by Seneca. In Russia, Seneca's *Troades* were translated by Mikhail V. Lomonosov (1711–1765), the eponym of Moscow University, whose drama *Tamira i Selim* (ca. 1750) shows Senecan influence.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the nineteenth century, dramatists from almost everywhere were remarkably resistant to drawing from antiquity. On the other hand, original Greek and Latin plays were put on stage to a comparably large extent. But the modern drama as a whole had produced its own "classics," which in the nineteenth century increasingly transcended the borders of national literatures. In Italy, for example, Goethe and Schiller were popular, German poets were fond of Shakespeare, and so on. Senecan influence is, if at all, to be observed only in those plays that deliberately turned to ancient subjects, as in Franz Grillparzer's *Das goldene Vließ*. In this trilogy, however, the reception of Seneca is only part of a wider range of adaptation that was to become typical from that time up to the present; Grillparzer consulted Seneca's *Medea* only as one source among others, including Euripides's *Medea* and Apollonius Rhodius's

and Valerius Flaccus's Argonaut epics. And it is significant that it was not primarily these texts that inspired Grillparzer, but a mythological lexicon he happened to come across.

The German and Austrian "Schicksalsdrama" was, if at all, influenced by Greek tragedy, not by Seneca. In Spain there was no interest in Seneca's tragedies as *inventionis fons*; there were, however, from the middle of the nineteenth century onward new translations there as elsewhere, including into Czech and Russian. In England, Seneca had no remarkable influence on the development of nineteenth-century tragedy. In the Netherlands, too, there are only single and discontinuous traces of reception as in S. Izn. Wiselius's *Polydorus* (1813), which is partly based on passages from Seneca's *Troades*. The interest in Senecan tragedy was almost wholly limited to his philological work, not only in the nineteenth but also in the twentieth century.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The increasing accessibility of Seneca's tragedies by way of translations was perhaps the reason why twentieth-century dramatists sometimes utilized Seneca again when they referred to ancient tragedy. In Italy, Gabriele d'Annunzio (Citti and Neri 2001: 93–96; Zwierlein 2006: 36–45), with his *Fedra*, showed a new interest in Seneca. The documents of (possible) receptions of Senecan tragedy are solitary, and often the Senecan influence is combined with that of others and depends on the choice of the subjects and their adaptations in the course of literary history. In France, Jean Anouilh (1910–1987) took into consideration not only the Attic tragedians, but also Seneca, in his dramas based on ancient plots. The same must be said of Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), to whom Seneca's "théâtre de la cruauté" naturally appealed. To Camille Claudel (1864–1943), Seneca was the greatest dramatist of all times.

In Germany, Seneca was not as popular as in Italy or France. Although expressionistic mannerisms in German drama can be strikingly similar to Seneca's, they do not result from any interaction with his texts. When ancient tragedy was reused for examples, it was the Greek literature that held sway. Franz Werfel (1890–1945), for instance, in his *Troades* recurred to Euripides' *Hekabe*, not to Seneca's *Troades*. In Spain, Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo (1864–1936) in his *Fedra* followed Euripides and Racine, not Seneca (Citti and Neri 2001: 96 f.), but he translated and performed Seneca's *Medea* in 1933. In 1957 José María Pemán produced a version of the Thyestes theme, based on Seneca. In English literature, Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888–1965) wrote appreciative

essays on Seneca the tragedian (see Eliot 1934a and 1934b), but Seneca hardly had an effect on his own dramatic writing. In the Netherlands the picture is similar. On the whole, affinities to Senecan drama in twentieth-century writing are incidental; but there were some efforts to adapt Seneca's tragedies in new versions for the stage, as did Hugo Claus (1929–2008) with *Thyestes* and *Oedipus* in Belgium.³⁵

THE PRESENT

At present Seneca's tragedies have for some decades inspired new interest at least among philologists. To check the whole range of Senecan reception today is an easier task than it used to be. Information about performances of Seneca's tragedies, not only on professional stages but also at schools or universities, that is readily available on the Internet or in audio-visual documents seems to reveal that today there *is* more interest in Seneca than in the last two centuries. But it is also possible that there were significant but forgotten or hidden activities at schools and universities that cannot be reconstructed or verified due to the lack of documents. New stagings³⁶ of (or adaptations of) Seneca's dramas are rare when compared to the stagings of ancient Greek tragedies, but when there are any, they are noted in the newspapers as well as in philological reviews, as happened with Durs Grünbein's (b. 1962) version of Seneca's *Thyestes* (2001),³⁷ which was performed at the Nationaltheater Mannheim, with the staging of Seneca's *Troades* in Latin by members of the Institut für Klassische Philologie at the University of Munich in November 1993 (Stroh 1994; Volk 2000), or with the Latin version of Seneca's *Medea* at Basel, Switzerland, in June 2000 (Lenz 2001), organized and performed by members of the Seminar für Klassische Philologie at the University of Basel.³⁸

This discussion will close with a brief review of a special kind of reception of ancient drama in modern times: the musical adaptation.³⁹ The (pseudo-)Senecan *Octavia* belongs to the infancy of the new musical genre, "opera". Traces of Seneca are to be found in Charpentier's *Médée* (Sinn 2008)

³⁵ For further information on Seneca on the modern stage see the single contributions in Harrison (ed.) 2000a. See also Citti and Neri 2001: 81–148 (including the chapter "I tiranni senecani in O'Neill, Camus e Ayrton" 90–93); Coccia 2002; and Lenz 2001.

³⁶ Cf. the chapter "Rappresentazioni teatrali" in Citti and Neri 2001: 82–87.

³⁷ Cf. Reitz 2002 and Seidensticker 2002.

³⁸ Cf. also Fantham 2000.

³⁹ Draheim 1981 is an indispensable guide in this area.

and Cherubini's *Médée* (Trentin 2001) as well as in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* (Seidel 1987). The structure of Seneca's tragedy is mirrored by the structure and conciseness of many opera libretti (Schubert 2004: 371–392). In the twentieth century, there are composers who made use of Senecan texts taken from his tragedies without creating a stage play, as did Jan Novák, a Czech composer (1921–1984) who was a devotee of Latin literature. His impressive *Planctus Troadum*, based on the text of the first scene of Seneca's *Troades*, was written in 1969, immediately after he had had to leave his home country in 1968 (see Schubert 2005: 182–188). Another very intense piece of music is *Medea* by Yannis Xenakis (1922–2001), in which the composer also does not make use of the drama as a whole but combines certain passages from the tragedy, mainly chorus parts. Perhaps it is this kind of adaptation that points to the future, at least in the field of musical works whose underlying texts very often are fragments intentionally broken off from an entire work or composed of fragments taken from different and sometimes remote sources and arranged into a new context (see Schubert 2004: 408–410).

From antiquity until now, the popularity of Seneca's dramatic oeuvre has often varied. So has the popularity of the single tragedies. But over the centuries five of them have proven to be of constant interest: *Thyestes*, *Troades*, *Medea*, *Phaedra* and *Hercules furens*.⁴⁰ Although the other tragedies, *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus*, *Phoenissae*, and *Hercules Oetaeus* (and *Octavia*) have met with a considerably minor interest, Seneca's *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus* served in the second half of the last century in the field of musical adaptations as starting points for the libretti of two operas composed by Josep Soler (*Agamemnon* 1960 and *Edipo y Iocasta* 1975). It is difficult to predict the reception of Seneca's tragedies on stage, in concert halls, in libraries, or in lecture halls. To judge by the influence of Seneca's tragedies up to the present there is hope that creativity will overcome sterility well into the future.

⁴⁰ In the 20th century *Phaedra* and *Medea* are dominating within the adaptations of Seneca's tragedies; cf. the chapter "Adattamenti, rifacimenti, riprese di singoli drammi" in Citti and Neri 2001: 93–148.

PART TWO

PHILOSOPHY

CONTEXT:
SENECA'S PHILOSOPHICAL PREDECESSORS
AND CONTEMPORARIES

John Sellars

1. INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Lucius Annaeus Seneca lived, thought, and wrote during a complex and comparatively neglected period in the history of philosophy.¹ The philosophical scene of the first century AD was quite different from the much better known philosophical culture of the Hellenistic period that came to an end in the previous century. During the third and second centuries BC, the majority of philosophical activity in the ancient world took place in Athens, just as it had during the days of Plato and Aristotle, and aspiring philosophers from all over the Eastern Mediterranean traveled to Athens where they could join in with the intellectual activity taking place at the Academy, Lyceum, Garden, and Painted Stoa. By the time of Seneca's birth at the end of the first century BC, Athens was no longer the predominant center of philosophical activity in the ancient world; philosophy had undergone a process of dispersal and decentralization.² Philosophical schools sprang up locally—in Rome, Alexandria, Rhodes, and no doubt elsewhere—and in Italy people had already started writing philosophy in Latin.³ Seneca first studied philosophy within this decentralized and bilingual philosophical climate, drawing upon both the earlier Greek tradition and this new contemporary situation.

¹ For general studies of philosophy in Rome, see Griffin and Barnes 1989, Morford 2002, Trapp 2007b, and Sorabji and Sharples 2007. For studies of Stoicism in Rome, see the above plus Arnold 1911, Chevallier 1960, Haase 1989, Gill 2003, and Reydams-Schils 2005. For Seneca's place within Roman Stoicism, see Grimal 1989.

² On the decentralization of philosophy, see Frede 1999, Sedley 2003b, Ferrary 2007, and, with specific reference to the Stoa, Sedley 2003a: 24–32.

³ In the period before Seneca's birth, the most famous examples of Latin philosophical texts were those of Cicero and Lucretius, but predating both of these were earlier Italian Epicureans who wrote in Latin, notably Amafinius, on whom see Cic. *Tusc.* 4.6 f. with Ducos 1989 and Sedley 2009: 39 f.

The tales of the rise of philosophy in Rome and the decline of philosophy in Athens are inevitably intertwined. The introduction of Greek philosophy into the Roman world is traditionally connected with the famous embassy of three Athenian philosophers who visited Rome in 155 BC, ostensibly there to ask for a fine imposed on Athens to be lifted, but since remembered for their fine oratory (and their beards).⁴ The earliest generations of Romans attracted to philosophy traveled to its natural home, Athens, in order to learn more. A little later, Cicero followed in their footsteps and went on to send his son to do the same, although by then the situation had already changed. A key moment in the transformation occurred in 88 BC when Athens sided with King Mithridates against Rome and the city was subsequently put under siege by Sulla.⁵ Both the Academy and the Epicurean Garden were probably damaged, if not destroyed.⁶ Leading intellectuals fled the city, including the head of the Academy, Philo of Larissa.⁷ Some, like Philo, went to Rome, while others found a variety of new locations: Alexandria, Rhodes, and the Bay of Naples, to name the best known.⁸ Cicero observed first hand many of these upheavals. He welcomed exiled Athenian philosophers into his own home, and visited Athens in the aftermath, as well as new centers of philosophical activity that sprang up, such as Rhodes.⁹ Cicero also played a key role in the further decentralization of philosophy by writing popular accounts in Latin of the principal doctrines of the main Hellenistic schools, in the process laying the foundations for a comprehensive Latin philosophical vocabulary.¹⁰

⁴ On the embassy see, e.g., Gell. 6.14.8–10 and Plut. *Cato Maior* 22.1–3 with Griffin 1989: 2–5 and Ferrary 2007. On beards see Sellars 2003: 15–19.

⁵ On Athens and Mithridates see Posidonius *apud* Athen. 5.211d–215b (= frg. 253 Edelstein and Kidd 1972). On the siege of Sulla, see Plut. *Sulla* 12.1–13.4 and App. *Mithr.* 30–45.

⁶ Clay (2009: 27) suggests that both the Academy and Garden were destroyed. The evidence he cites (Plut. *Sulla* 12.3 and App. *Mithr.* 30) makes reference to the Academy, and Plutarch also mentions the Lyceum, but there is no explicit mention of the Garden. Nevertheless, the general descriptions of the siege certainly imply that the Garden, just outside the city walls and close to the Academy, would have suffered severely. See also Frede 1999: 790–793.

⁷ See Cic. *Brut.* 306.

⁸ Antiochus (the Academic), Posidonius (the Stoic), and Philodemus (the Epicurean) all studied in Athens around this time but left for Alexandria, Rhodes, and Herculaneum, respectively.

⁹ On Cicero's travels to Athens and Rhodes, see Cic. *Brut.* 315f. and Plut. *Cicero* 4.1–4. For his reflections on the state of Athens, see *fin.* 5.1–5.

¹⁰ Previous philosophical work in Latin, by Amfinius and Lucretius, was limited to Epicureanism. In addition to his discussions of Stoic, Epicurean, and Academic doctrines, Cicero also produced a Latin version of Plato's *Timaeus*. On Cicero and philosophy in Latin, see Levy 1992a.

Seneca's own philosophical education took place in the aftermath of these dramatic changes. He wrote in Latin, but unlike previous Latin philosophical authors, such as Cicero and Lucretius, who simply made available to a Latin audience ideas derived from Greek philosophers, Seneca tried to do philosophy in Latin and for this reason it has been suggested that his works are the earliest properly *Latin* philosophical works that have come down to us.¹¹ Indeed, they are the only properly Latin philosophical works to survive from pagan antiquity, for the majority of Seneca's Roman contemporaries (Cornutus, Musonius Rufus) and successors (Marcus Aurelius) reverted to Greek for their philosophical writing. We have to wait until Augustine to find the next significant body of philosophical work in Latin. This turn to Latin no doubt reflects in part the fact that Seneca's own philosophical education took place in Rome, as well as the fact that he came from the monolingual Western Mediterranean rather than the bilingual East, but it also reflects the much wider changes in philosophical culture outlined above.¹² The decentralization of philosophy led to a number of flourishing philosophical communities in Italy, such as the circle of Epicureans around Philodemus in Herculaneum, while the works of Cicero and Lucretius opened up the Greek philosophical tradition to a new audience. Seneca's philosophy was formed in a new specifically Roman intellectual context that would prove to be relatively short lived.

2. SENECA'S TEACHERS

Seneca names three teachers with whom he studied philosophy: Papirius Fabianus, Sotion of Alexandria, and Attalus the Stoic.¹³ Taken together, these teachers reflect the transformed character of ancient philosophical culture. Attalus was from Pergamum in the East, while Fabianus and Sotion were

¹¹ See Inwood (2005a: 13), "Seneca stands out for his striking choice to do what I would call primary philosophy (rather than exegetical or missionary work) in Latin"; also *ibid.* 20, "Seneca, much more than Cicero, is thinking creatively and philosophically in Latin." However, Seneca also complained of Latin's limitations (*epist.* 58.1), echoing the earlier complaint of Lucretius (1.136–139). On philosophy in Latin, see Grimal 1992a.

¹² Seneca clearly knew Greek (he translates some lines from Cleanthes at *epist.* 107.10 f.), but it seems reasonable to presume that it was learned in the classroom and as such would not have been his natural medium of thought.

¹³ Seneca is himself our principal source of evidence for his teachers. For discussion of his three teachers and the school of the Sextii, see Zeller 1880: III.1, 675–682 (trans. in Zeller 1883: 180–188), Grimal 1978a: 247–262, Fillion-Lahille 1984: 256–272, Lana 1992, and Inwood 2005a: 1–22.

both products of a Roman school of philosophy founded by Quintus Sextius. Via both his pupils and his writings, Sextius also proved to be an important influence on Seneca, so it may be appropriate to begin with him.¹⁴

Sextius was the founder of his own philosophical school in Rome and it was probably handed down to his son, Sextius Niger, although Seneca reports that the school did not last for very long.¹⁵ Sextius wrote his philosophy in Greek, but combined this with a Roman sensibility.¹⁶ He also drew upon both Stoic and Pythagorean doctrines, and Seneca characterizes him as a Stoic, while noting that Sextius himself rejected the label.¹⁷ It is tempting to imagine someone in the mold of Cato the Younger, embodying the implicit Stoic values of traditional Roman morality, and such a comparison is given some credence by the fact that Sextius refused to accept an offer of public office from Julius Caesar.¹⁸ The Pythagorean influence on Sextius manifested itself in vegetarianism and the practice of daily self-examination, both of which Seneca adopted.¹⁹ Indeed, Seneca appears to have admired and emulated Sextius greatly. From what we know, Sextius combined a focus on practical ethical concerns with continual self-examination, ascetic training, and a broadly Stoic worldview, without accepting the limitations of doctrinal conformity. All of this is highly reminiscent of Seneca himself, and it also prefigures many of the features of subsequent Imperial Stoicism, such as we find in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. Although only a shadowy figure to us, it may be that Sextius influenced the subsequent development of Roman Stoicism far more profoundly than has hitherto been noted.²⁰

¹⁴ Seneca mentions Sextius at *epist.* 59.7, 64.2–5, 73.12, 73.15, 98.13, 108.17–19, *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).36.1, 5 (= *de ira* 3).36.1, *nat.* 7.32.2.

¹⁵ On the school of Sextius, see Zeller 1880: III.1, 675–682 (trans. in Zeller 1883: 180–188), Griffin 1976: 37–42, Fillion-Lahille 1984: 256 f., Lana 1992, and Morford 2002: 133 f. On its specifically Roman character, the plurality of Sextii, and its short life, see *nat.* 7.32.2. On Quintus Sextius as *pater*, see *epist.* 64.2, 98.13.

¹⁶ See *epist.* 59.7.

¹⁷ See *epist.* 64.2. On the Pythagorean influence on Sextius, see *epist.* 108.17 f. with Kahn 2001: 92 f.

¹⁸ See *epist.* 98.13; see also Plut. *mor.* 77e.

¹⁹ See *epist.* 108.22 and *dial.* 5 (= *de ira* 3).36.1, respectively, with Kahn 2001: 92 f. for further discussion. Seneca later dropped the vegetarianism (*epist.* 108.22).

²⁰ Having said that, Inwood (2007c: 139) refers to the “widespread but misleading impression that later Stoicism is concerned excessively with ethics” and he notes late Stoic texts concerned with physics such as Seneca’s *Naturales quaestiones*, Cornutus’s *Theologiae graecae compendium*, and Cleomedes’s *Caelestia*. While Inwood is right to remind us of these texts, I still think there is room for a strong Sextian influence on later Stoicism. First, we might note that despite a focus on ethical matters within the school, the Sextian Fabianus also had strong interests in physics and may well have been a key influence behind the *Naturales*

Two of Sextius's pupils contributed to Seneca's own education. The first of these, Papirius Fabianus, noted as a rhetorician as well as a philosopher, is said to have written more works of philosophy than Cicero, although all of these are now lost.²¹ He took from Sextius a skepticism about obscure theoretical studies (or at least about their value for practical matters), but retained a healthy interest in physics, writing a book on natural causes.²² Seneca also reports a book on politics.²³ This suggests a range of interests not too dissimilar from Seneca's own. The second pupil, Sotion of Alexandria, also followed Sextius's Pythagorean habits of vegetarianism and self-examination.²⁴ We have limited information about Sotion, but a fragment from his work *Περὶ ὁργῆς*, preserved by Stobaeus, parallels material in Seneca's *De ira*, suggesting an influence.²⁵ Indeed, it is worth noting that Seneca also cites Fabianus on how to cure emotions, and so this topic may well have been a wider preoccupation of the Sextian school.²⁶ It is striking how closely the interests of the Sextian philosophers correlate with Seneca's own concerns, to the point that it is tempting to think of Seneca as simply an *ex officio* member of the school. However, by way of caution, it should also be remembered that almost all of our information about the Sextians comes from Seneca himself and so is no doubt to some extent colored by his own interests.

quaestiones (see below). Second, Sextius's adoption of Pythagorean ascetic practices prefigures the focus on mental training (or "spiritual exercises" or "techniques of the self") that we find in Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius and that some have argued sits rather uneasily alongside the Stoic monistic psychology inherited from Socrates. One person who has hinted at the influence of Sextius is Frede (1999: 787).

²¹ Seneca mentions Fabianus at *epist.* 11.4, 40.12, 52.11, 58.6, 100.1–12, *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*) 23.5, *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*) 10.1, 13.9, *nat.* 3.27.3. He is discussed by Seneca's father, in *contr.* 2. pr. 1–4, who also purports to record extracts of his declamations throughout Book 2 of the *Controversiae*. On the quantity of his writing, see *epist.* 100.9. See further Fillion-Lahille 1984: 258 f., Lana 1992: 117–122, and Ducos 2000.

²² For his skepticism, see *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*) 10.1, 13.9; for his work *Libri causarum naturalium*, see Charis. 135.19–23 (note also 134.13; 190.8; 186.6 Barwick), which Seneca may well be citing at *nat.* 3.27.3.

²³ See *epist.* 100.1.

²⁴ On Sotion see *epist.* 49.2 and 108.17–22.

²⁵ Compare Stob. 3.550.7–17 (Wachsmuth-Hense) with Sen. *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).10.5 and see the discussions in Fillion-Lahille 1984: 261–272 and 1989: 1632–1636, who suggests that Sotion is the third key influence on *De ira* after Chrysippus and Posidonius.

²⁶ The two passages where Seneca cites Fabianus's skepticism toward technicality and sophistry (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*] 10.1, 13.9) are both concerned with the emotions. Fabianus's point, as Seneca reports it, is that overcoming powerful emotions requires more than mere theoretical subtlety.

Seneca's third teacher, Attalus, differed from the Sextians insofar as he was a self-proclaimed Stoic.²⁷ He came to Rome from Pergamum, a noted center of Stoic activity in the new, decentralized philosophical world.²⁸ Seneca records that he was a regular attendee at the lectures of Attalus, "the first to arrive and the last to leave," and that he used to talk with him outside the classroom as well.²⁹ It was from Attalus that Seneca first learned his Stoicism and, notwithstanding the impact of the Sextians, Seneca always described himself as a Stoic, never a Sextian.³⁰ Having said that, Attalus and the Sextians had much in common, including a preference for simplicity in life and the practice of regular self-examination, both themes that would mark Seneca's own work.

3. STOICISM

It was from Attalus, then, that Seneca probably gained his introduction to Stoicism. Whatever Stoic texts may have been available in Rome at the time, Attalus would presumably have had access to even more during his time in Pergamum, so it seems reasonable to assume that Seneca would have had access to a wide range of Stoic material, even if some of his knowledge was only secondhand.³¹ One of the consequences of the decentralization of philosophy that took place in the previous century was an increased focus on the foundational texts of each philosophical school by its members.³² It seems likely that Seneca would have spent much time reading the canonical texts of

²⁷ On Attalus as a Stoic, see *epist.* 67.15 and Seneca the Elder *suas.* 2.12. Seneca mentions Attalus at *epist.* 9.7, 63.5, 67.15, 72.8, 81.22, 108.2 f., 108.13–16, 108.23, 110.14–20, *nat.* 2.48.2, 2.1.1–3. For further discussion, see Fillion-Lahille 1984: 260 f., and Follet 1989.

²⁸ On Stoics in Pergamum, see Pfeiffer 1968: 234–251. The first Stoic associated with Pergamum was Crates of Mallus, who moved there at the invitation of King Eumenes II. The most famous Stoic associated with the place was Athenodorus Cordylion of Tarsus, librarian and expurgator of Zeno's *Republic* (Diog. Laert. 7.34), who was visited by Cato and traveled with him to Rome (Plut. *Cato Minor* 10.1, 16.1; *mor.* 777a). This is an example of the decentralization of philosophy commencing well before the siege of Athens.

²⁹ See *epist.* 108.3.

³⁰ At *nat.* 7.32.2 Seneca refers to the Sextians alongside the Academy and the school of Pythagoras as if it were a distinct philosophical school to which one might claim to belong.

³¹ We know that quite technical Stoic texts did make it to Italy by this time, thanks to the fragments of Chrysippus's *Λογικά ζητήματα* found at Herculaneum (*PHerc* 307). Note also Cicero's reference to Lucullus's library of Stoic texts (*fin.* 3.7) and the report that Seneca's younger contemporary Persius owned a substantial collection of works by Chrysippus (Suet. *Vit. Pers.*).

³² On this, see Sedley 2003b: 36 f.

the early Stoics.³³ There is some evidence of such reading in his philosophical works. The founder of the Athenian Stoa was, of course, Zeno of Citium, and Seneca mentions him throughout his works.³⁴ He also quotes from "our Zeno" (*Zenon noster*) a number of times, although in a number of cases only to mock his syllogisms, and it is difficult to detect any specific influence.³⁵ Seneca also had access to texts by Zeno's pupil and successor as Scholarch, Cleanthes of Assos, and he translates into Latin some lines from Cleanthes for the benefit of Lucilius.³⁶ The most important of the early Stoics, however, was Cleanthes's successor, Chrysippus of Soli. Seneca mentions him frequently,³⁷ usually in glowing terms, although he is willing to criticize Chrysippus where necessary.³⁸ Given the importance of Chrysippus to subsequent Stoics, a number of scholars have tried to point to Chrysippean sources behind some of Seneca's works, especially his longer essays such as *De beneficiis* and *De ira*.³⁹ However, in general there is little explicit debt to or sustained engagement with the Stoa's canonical early texts. Occasional quotations and allusions suggest familiarity but there is no effort on Seneca's part to join the slowly developing commentary tradition within ancient philosophy. Instead, like his Stoic compatriot Epictetus a little later, Seneca warns against becoming a philologist at the expense of philosophy, which, again like Epictetus, is for

³³ A little later we find a number of passages in Arrian's reports of Epictetus's lectures that indicate that much time was spent reading through works by Chrysippus, although Epictetus warns against forsaking philosophy for philology; see, e.g., Epictetus *diss.* 1.4.14, 1.17.13–18, 2.23.44.

³⁴ Seneca mentions Zeno at *epist.* 6.6, 22.11, 33.4, 33.7, 33.9, 64.10, 82.9, 83.9–11, 83.17, 104.21, 108.38, *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).16.7, *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).18.1, *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).1.4, 3.1, 3.2, 6.4, 6.5, *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).1.10, 14.3, *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).14.5, *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Heb.*).12.4, *benef.* 4.39.1 f., 7.8.2, *nat.* 7.19.1.

³⁵ See, e.g., *epist.* 82.9 (= *SVF* 1.196), 83.9 (= *SVF* 1.229); note also *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).16.7 (= *SVF* 1.215), *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).3.2 (= *SVF* 1.271), *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).14.3 (= *SVF* 1.277).

³⁶ See *epist.* 107.10 f. (= *SVF* 1.527). The same lines are preserved in Greek in Epictetus *Ench.* 53 (= *SVF* *ibid.*). See also *epist.* 108.10 (= *SVF* 1.487) and *benef.* 5.14.1 (= *SVF* 1.580). Beyond these passages, Seneca also mentions Cleanthes at *epist.* 6.6, 33.4, 33.7 f., 44.3, 64.10, 94.4 f., 113.23, *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).6.5, *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).1.10, *benef.* 6.11.1 f., 6.12.2.

³⁷ Seneca mentions Chrysippus at *epist.* 9.14, 22.11, 33.4, 56.3, 104.22, 108.38, 113.23, *dial.* 2 (= *const.*).17.1, *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).3.1, 6.4 f., 8.1, *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).1.10, *benef.* 1.3.8 f., 1.4.1, 2.17.3, 2.25.3, 3.22.1, 7.8.2.

³⁸ See *benef.* 1.3.8–4.4 (= *SVF* 2.1082).

³⁹ For a Chrysippean source behind *De ira* see Fillion-Lahille 1984: 51–118 and 1989: 1619–1626, with critical discussion in Inwood (2005a: 27 ff.). Braund (2009: 22) suggests a Chrysippean influence behind *De beneficiis*, citing Chaumartin (1985), although in fact the latter suggests that the main source standing behind *De beneficiis* is the Περὶ Καρτίων of Hecaton. Seneca mentions both Chrysippus and Hecaton at *benef.* 1.3.8 f.

him above all a way of life.⁴⁰ Seneca's debt to the early Stoa is, then, a broad philosophical debt of the sort shared by any admirer of the Stoic philosophy, but it is nevertheless a genuine debt to the orthodox Stoicism exemplified by Chrysippus.⁴¹

Just like any Stoic, Seneca owes a debt to the early Stoa. But what about the so-called "Middle Stoa"? The division between an Early and a Middle Stoa has recently been called into question.⁴² On the traditional view, members of the Middle Stoa watered down the high ideals of the Early Stoa, shifting focus from the moral perfectionism embodied in the idealized sage to the everyday moral concerns of real individuals. This shift in concern is most evident in the views of Panaetius, and Seneca is one of our key sources here:

I think that Panaetius gave a very neat answer to a certain youth who asked him whether the wise man should become a lover: "As to the wise man, we shall see later; but you and I, who are as yet far removed from wisdom, should not trust ourselves to fall into a state that is disordered, uncontrolled, enslaved to another, contemptible to itself."⁴³

Seneca cites this with approval. Cicero suggests that this shift in focus evident with Panaetius, and perhaps initiated by Diogenes of Babylon, was the product of the influence of Plato and Aristotle on these two Stoics.⁴⁴ He adds that the shift in emphasis in ethics was mirrored by a similar shift in political philosophy as well.⁴⁵ These two shifts are evident throughout Seneca's work: a practical concern with moral improvement for the imperfect and a pragmatic desire to engage in the messy world of real politics. Do these two features of Seneca's work indicate the influence of Panaetius?

⁴⁰ For Seneca's famous warning against philology, see *epist.* 108.23 (within the context of reminiscing about the examples set by Sotion and Attalus). For parallel sentiments in Epictetus, see n. 33 *supra*. For how the Stoics conceived philosophy, see Sellars 2003.

⁴¹ Inwood (2005a: 47 f.) argues for Seneca's orthodoxy and agreement with Chrysippus on issues relating to psychology and the emotions, against charges of innovation; compare *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).7.4 with Chrysippus *apud* Galen *Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 4.2.8–18 (= *SVF* 3.462).

⁴² The idea of a distinctive "Middle Stoa" inaugurated by Panaetius was first proposed in Schmekel 1892; see Dyck 1996: 17. For a recent questioning of the notion, see Sedley 2003a: 23 f.

⁴³ *Epist.* 116.5 (= Panaetius frg. 114 van Straaten 1952): *Eleganter mihi videtur Panaetius respondisse adolescentulo cuidam quaerenti an sapiens amaturus esset. "De sapiente" inquit "videbimus: mihi et tibi, qui adhuc a sapiente longe absumus, non est committendum ut incidamus in rem commotam, inpotentem, alteri emancipatam, vilem sibi."*

⁴⁴ See Cic. *fin.* 4.79 (= frg. 55 van Straaten 1952), *Tusc.* 1.79 (= frg. 56/83 van Straaten 1952). On the influence of Plato and Aristotle, see Frede 1999: 782–785.

⁴⁵ See Cic. *leg.* 3.13 f. (= frg. 48/61 van Straaten 1952). On the political shift, see Sellars 2007: 20–24.

While some have argued that Seneca is following Panaetius here,⁴⁶ others have suggested that these apparent shifts away from the orthodox Stoa merely illustrate Seneca's own "epistemic humility": Seneca prefers to focus on those things to which he has ready access via his everyday experience.⁴⁷ One thing is clear, however, namely that Seneca rarely mentions Panaetius in his works compared with his frequent references to the early Stoic triumvirate of Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus. Beyond the quotation cited above, Seneca mentions Panaetius just twice and neither instance is significant.⁴⁸ There is, then, little explicit evidence for a strong direct Panaetian influence on Seneca.

In marked contrast to this lack of engagement with Panaetius, Seneca often mentions and quotes from Posidonius, especially in the *Epistulae morales* and the *Naturales quaestiones*.⁴⁹ Posidonius's interests in physical phenomena are well attested, so it should come as no surprise to find Seneca drawing on his work in the *Naturales quaestiones*, and within the same context Seneca also draws on the work of Posidonius's pupil Asclepiodotus.⁵⁰ Beyond these explicit references, a number of scholars have argued that Posidonius forms an important implicit source for Seneca's discussion of anger in the second book of *De ira*.⁵¹ The reason for positing a Posidonian influence in this work seems to have been to explain the apparently dualistic turn that Seneca takes here in his psychology. However, it has recently been argued that no such turn exists and Seneca's position is more orthodox than some have supposed.⁵² Consequently, there is no need to posit a hidden Posidonian source behind Seneca's text. Nevertheless, we can see that in general Seneca makes good

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Cooper and Procopé 1995: xvii.

⁴⁷ See Inwood 2005a: 3.

⁴⁸ See *epist.* 33.4 (= frg. 53 van Straaten 1952) and *nat.* 7.30.2 (= frg. 75 van Straaten 1952). In the former, his name appears in a list of Stoics; in the latter he is cited for his view on comets. Neither offers evidence for an influence of the sort under discussion.

⁴⁹ Seneca mentions Posidonius at *epist.* 33.4, 83.10, 88.21–28, 90.5, 90.7–13, 90.20–25, 90.30–32, 95.65 f., 104.22, 108.38, 121.1 and *nat.* 2.26.4, 2.26.6, 2.54.1–3, 4.3.2, 6.17.3, 6.21.2, 6.24.6, 7.20.1, 7.20.4, 7.21.1, and he quotes Posidonius at *epist.* 78.28, 90.7, 90.22 f., 90.25, 90.31 f., 94.38, 113.28 and *nat.* 1.5.10, 1.5.12.

⁵⁰ Asclepiodotus is cited by Seneca at *nat.* 2.26.2, 2.26.6, 2.30.1, 5.15.1, 6.17.3, 6.22.2. On this Asclepiodotus, one of a number of ancient philosophers with that name, see Goulet 1989. He is thought to be the author of a short extant treatise on military tactics.

⁵¹ For example, Holler 1934: 16–24 (with Inwood 2005a: 41 f.) and Fillion-Lahille 1984: 121–199 and 1989: 1626–1632 (with Inwood 2005a: 28, 33).

⁵² See Inwood 2005a: 23–64. There is also the question of just how heterodox Posidonius's psychology really was, and whether our principal source for his views, Galen, is entirely reliable, on which see Gill 2006: 266–290.

use of material from Posidonius, citing him as an authoritative Stoic standing alongside Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus.⁵³

4. OTHER GREEK PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

Alongside Seneca's obvious debt to a number of earlier Stoics, his philosophical works also include references to a wide array of other ancient philosophers.⁵⁴ It will not be possible to discuss all of these here, many of which are of limited significance. Of those that are of greater significance, the one that has attracted the most attention is Epicurus.⁵⁵ Many readers have noticed that Seneca frequently quotes from Epicurus in his correspondence with Lucilius, especially in the early letters.⁵⁶ Indeed, Epicurus is mentioned more often than any other philosopher in Seneca's prose works, and we might also note that Lucretius is the most cited poet.⁵⁷ How are we to explain this taste for Epicureanism in the works of a supposedly committed Stoic? A number of explanations have been offered. One is to call into question Seneca's commitment to the Stoa and brand him a philosophically muddled eclectic.⁵⁸ Another is to suggest a complex pedagogic strategy within the correspondence to Lucilius, in which Seneca gently tries to draw in his Epicurean addressee at the opening of the exchange by offering him familiar tidbits.⁵⁹ A

⁵³ Or sometimes *not* citing him, but simply listing him alongside other eminent Stoics when making the point that philosophy ought not to rely upon quotations from authorities; see, e.g., *epist.* 33.3 f. (= T54 Edelstein and Kidd 1972), 108.36–38 (= T55 Edelstein and Kidd 1972).

⁵⁴ For a complete annotated list of Seneca's references to other philosophers, see Motto 1970: 143–160.

⁵⁵ Seneca mentions Epicurus too often to list them all here; for a complete list, see Motto 1970: 150 f.

⁵⁶ Any attempt to discuss the motivations at work behind the *Epistulae morales* will open up questions about the status of these texts, such as whether the correspondence is genuine. It is not possible to address this issue here, on which there is a considerable literature. For a helpful overview of the *status quaestionis* and further references, see Inwood 2007a: xii–xv, with further recent discussion in Wilson 2001 and Inwood 2007c. Inwood follows Griffin (1976: 416–419) in claiming that the correspondence is “essentially fictitious” (Inwood 2007c: 134). The matter is complicated further by the fact that the collection of letters that has come down to us appears to be incomplete (on which see Reynolds 1965a: 17).

⁵⁷ For a list of Seneca's references to Lucretius see Motto 1970: 26. Braund (2009: 28–30) suggests a further potential Epicurean influence on Seneca, in the form of Philodemus in the *De clementia*.

⁵⁸ See Rist 1989 for a discussion of Seneca's status as a Stoic, although Rist doesn't explicitly address the Epicurean element within the letters to Lucilius.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Hadot 1995: 210.

third suggests a subtle literary nod to Epicurus in order to indicate to readers that the correspondence with Lucilius is consciously modeled on the form (though not the content) of Epicurus's own philosophical letters.⁶⁰ It may well be that the reason is far more prosaic; Seneca simply happened to be reading Epicurus at the time that he started the correspondence and wanted to share some of what he found. We needn't take this as a sign of burgeoning eclecticism either, for, as Seneca himself often says, Epicurus's wisdom is not the sole property of his disciples but rather belongs to all humankind.⁶¹ The fact that Seneca feels the need to make these apologies to Lucilius for quoting Epicurus also counts against the suggestion that Lucilius was an Epicurean waiting to be converted.⁶² The Epicurean apophthegms that Seneca does share function more as examples of generic philosophical wisdom than samples of specifically Epicurean doctrine. If they do have a pedagogic function then it is more likely as part of an exhortation to the philosophical life as such. It is also worth noting that beyond the correspondence with Lucilius Seneca can often be quite hostile toward Epicurus.⁶³

Looking back further, beyond the Hellenistic schools, we see fairly limited interest in or engagement with the great Athenian philosophers that came before: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Seneca mentions Socrates a number of times, usually as an idealized model of a philosopher, but there is little by way of explicit philosophical influence beyond the wider Socratic flavor of the Stoicism that permeates his work as a whole.⁶⁴ This is in marked contrast to Epictetus a few decades later, for whom Socrates figures far more prominently.⁶⁵

Seneca also has little to say explicitly about Plato, beyond a series of generally praiseworthy remarks,⁶⁶ but he does engage with the Platonism of his day in one of his few forays into metaphysics.⁶⁷ In Letter 58 Seneca discusses the nature of being (τὸ ὄν) and recounts a Platonic hierarchy of

⁶⁰ See Inwood 2007a: xiv and 2007c: 142–146.

⁶¹ See, e.g., *epist.* 8.8, 12.11, 14.17, 16.7, 21.9, 33.2. These remarks appear in the opening part of the correspondence where Seneca quotes Epicurus most often. It's also worth noting that Seneca does not restrict himself to Epicurus and often mentions other leading Epicureans such as Hermarchus and Metrodorus (see, e.g., *epist.* 6.6, 33.4).

⁶² For the claim that Lucilius was aphilosophical, see Motto 1970: xvii n. 25.

⁶³ See, e.g., *benef.* 4.19.1–4.

⁶⁴ For a full list of Seneca's references to Socrates, see Motto 1970: 156–158.

⁶⁵ For Epictetus's debt to Socrates, see Long 2002.

⁶⁶ See the list in Motto 1970: 154 f.

⁶⁷ The key texts here are *epist.* 58 and 65, on which see Rist 1989: 2010 f., Sedley 2005a: 122–138, Inwood 2007b (with references to earlier literature in Sedley 2005a: 122 n. 13).

six senses of being, in marked opposition to the orthodox Stoic account in which being is limited to bodies and (along with certain incorporeals denied being) subsumed under a higher genus of “something” (τί). However, rather than merely oppose this Platonic account to the Stoic position that we might expect him to hold, it has been suggested that Seneca’s account is the syncretic product of a dialogue between the two schools: elements of Stoic ontology are now incorporated within a Platonic schema.⁶⁸ However, Seneca’s stated aim in the letter is simply to present to Lucilius Plato’s account of being, and he doesn’t explicitly commit himself to holding the account he presents.⁶⁹ A little later in the correspondence, in Letter 65, Seneca returns to Platonic metaphysics, and is critical of both Platonic and Aristotelian accounts of cause, although the position he outlines in response is not that of an orthodox Stoic.⁷⁰ There is little general evidence for the claim that Seneca was drawn particularly to Platonism.⁷¹

As we have just seen, Seneca also engages with Aristotle in his works.⁷² He straightforwardly rejects the central Peripatetic doctrines on the emotions and the significance of externals, in just the way that one would expect an orthodox Stoic to do.⁷³ But Seneca does make good use of Aristotle’s meteorological research in the *Naturales quaestiones*,⁷⁴ and in the same place he also draws on the physical researches of Aristotle’s pupil Theophrastus.⁷⁵ It is in the *Naturales quaestiones* that we also see Seneca draw on material from the Presocratics, mainly for their physical theories, and he cites Thales, Anaxagoras, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, among others.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Sedley 2005a: 125.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., *epist.* 58.16.

⁷⁰ At *epist.* 65.11, for instance, Seneca suggests that time and place must be counted among causes.

⁷¹ Rist (1989: 2010) claims that “Seneca’s ‘unorthodoxies’ tend towards Platonism.” It has also been suggested that Seneca Platonizes when he discusses the soul and body, in, e.g., *epist.* 92.1f., although this seems mistaken; see Inwood 2005a: 38–41.

⁷² For a list of Seneca’s references to Aristotle, see Motto 1970: 145.

⁷³ On anger, see, e.g., *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).9.2, 17.1, *dial.* 5 (= *de ira* 3).3.1; on externals, see *benef.* 5.13.1.

⁷⁴ See *nat.* 1.1.2, 1.3.7, 1.8.6, 2.12.4–6, 6.13.1f., 6.14.1, 7.5.4, 7.30.1.

⁷⁵ See *nat.* 3.11.2–5, 3.16.5, 3.25.4, 3.25.7, 3.26.2, 4.2.16, 6.13.1f., 7.28.3.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., *nat.* 2.12.3, 2.18.1, 2.19.1, 3.13.1, 3.14.1–3, 4.2.17, 4.2.22, 4.3.6, 6.6.1–4, 6.9.1f., 6.10.1f., 7.5.3. We have already noted a Pythagorean influence on Seneca, via Sextius; see n. 17 *supra*.

5. ORTHODOXY

The presence of this wide variety of philosophical influences upon Seneca has led some to ask whether Seneca is in fact an orthodox Stoic.⁷⁷ It seems fairly clear that Seneca is a Stoic, although one open to outside influences.⁷⁸ This openness to other philosophical influences has traditionally been held to be a characteristic of the so-called Middle Stoa exemplified by Panaetius and Posidonius.⁷⁹ However, recent scholarship has argued that this openness was a feature of Stoicism from the very beginning, and that the innovation supposedly introduced by Panaetius has been overstated.⁸⁰ Indeed, Seneca himself notes disagreements between Cleanthes and Chrysippus in order to justify his own independence of thought while remaining a committed member of the Stoic tradition.⁸¹ So, in this respect it seems that Seneca does not deviate from many of his Stoic predecessors. As he himself writes, “we [Stoics] are not subject to a despot.”⁸² He is a committed Stoic, without being an unthinking disciple of Chrysippus.⁸³

6. CONTEMPORARIES

Having considered the most important of Seneca's predecessors, let us now turn briefly to consider some of his contemporaries, beginning with those whom he knew very well. Seneca's immediate circle included a number of philosophers and poets who shared his Stoic outlook. The most significant of these was probably Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, born in Libya and possibly a slave in Seneca's household.⁸⁴ Cornutus wrote philosophical, grammatical, and rhetorical works, in both Greek and Latin, of which his *Theologiae graecae compendium* survives, offering allegorical interpretations of traditional Greek mythology, following a tradition already well established within the Stoa.⁸⁵ He

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Rist 1989.

⁷⁸ See Inwood 2005a: 2.

⁷⁹ See n. 42 *supra*.

⁸⁰ See esp. Sedley 2003a: 23 f.

⁸¹ See *epist.* 113.23 (= *SVF* 1.525; 2.836).

⁸² *Epist.* 33.4: *non sumus sub rege*. See also *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).3.1.

⁸³ On Stoicism and the question of orthodoxy, see Sellars 2006: 10 f. For a concise defence of Seneca as a Stoic and a philosopher, see Inwood 2007a: xix.

⁸⁴ For biographical information, see Fuentes González 1994: 462–466.

⁸⁵ On the *Compendium*, see, e.g., Most 1989 and Boys-Stones 2007, who both supply references to further literature. For fragments of his other works, see Reppe 1906.

is also known to have dabbled in metaphysics.⁸⁶ Like Seneca, Cornutus was exiled from Rome by Nero, but before his exile Cornutus taught in the city and his pupils included two famous Stoics within Seneca's circle: Lucan and Persius. Lucan, author of *Pharsalia*, was the son of Seneca's younger brother, Lucius Annaeus Mela. His epic poem draws on a number of Stoic themes, but perhaps the most striking Stoic element in the *Pharsalia* is the portrait of Cato the Younger, by now canonized as the archetypal example of a Roman Stoic sage.⁸⁷ In his admiration for Cato, Lucan followed his uncle. Within the same circle around Seneca we also find the satirist Persius who, after losing his father, became a charge of Cornutus and a friend of Lucan.⁸⁸ Persius dedicated his fifth satire to his teacher Cornutus and, after dying young, left to Cornutus both his library and the task of posthumously editing his works. In his philosophical outlook Persius was a committed Stoic, embracing a rigorous version of Stoicism that he may have contrasted with Seneca's supposedly more moderate Stoicism.

Beyond this immediate circle of Stoics, we also know of other contemporary philosophers who contributed to Seneca's intellectual world. The most important was probably Demetrius the Cynic, who has been described as one of Seneca's "living heroes," and whose influence may well have contributed to Seneca's taste for practical moral exhortation over formal philosophical argument.⁸⁹ Seneca admired Demetrius's poverty and simplicity of life, as well as his commitment to conceiving of philosophy as a practical guide to living. This admiration for an austere Cynic contrasts with the common image of Seneca as a moderate Stoic, some distance from the more rigorous end of the Stoa.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ See Sedley (2005a: 117), who notes the survival of a book title attributed to Cornutus in *POxy* 3649, Περὶ ἐκτῶν β (on which, see Cockle 1984: 12 f.). As well as this hint at a concern with metaphysics, Cornutus is also reported to have written a work entitled *Against Athenodorus and Aristotle*, responding to Athenodorus's work *Against Aristotle's Categories*. See Porphyry in *Cat.* 86,23 f. and Simplicius in *Cat.* 62,24 with Hijmans 1975: 106–109.

⁸⁷ On Stoic themes in Lucan, see Colish 1990: 252–275, with references to further literature at 252 f.

⁸⁸ On Persius and his Stoicism, see Colish 1990: 194–203.

⁸⁹ Seneca mentions Demetrius at *epist.* 20.9, 62.3, 67.14, 91.19, *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*):3.3, 5.5 f., *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*):18.3, *nat.* 4 prol. 7 f., *benef.* 7.1.3–7, 7.2.1, 7.8.2, 7.11.1 f. On Demetrius, see Billerbeck 1979 and, within the wider context of Roman Cynicism, Goulet-Cazé 1990: 2768–2773, Griffin 1996, and Trapp 2007a. The phrase "living heroes" comes from Griffin 2007: 89. On exhortation over argument, see Griffin 1996: 200.

⁹⁰ While Griffin stresses Seneca's admiration for Demetrius, Inwood (2005a: 16) suggests that his influence on Seneca was probably minimal, citing Demetrius's "argument *against* the study of physical problems" reported by Seneca himself at *benef.* 7.1.5 and contrasting with

Alongside these figures, whom Seneca knew personally, a number of other contemporaries deserve a brief mention.⁹¹ The first of these is the Stoic Chaeremon who, like Seneca, is reported to have taught the Emperor Nero.⁹² If this is so then Seneca and Chaeremon may have met.⁹³ Like Cornutus, Chaeremon followed the Stoic practice of offering allegorical interpretations of myths, in this case drawn from Egyptian religion, reflecting his position as a scholar in Alexandria. Although Seneca and Chaeremon may have met and may have appreciated one another as fellow Stoics, they inhabited quite different intellectual worlds. A second noteworthy Stoic of the first century is Musonius Rufus, with whom Seneca may have had more in common.⁹⁴ Musonius came from an Etruscan family of the equestrian order. Like Seneca, Persius, Demetrius, and many others, Musonius found himself a victim of Nero, banished to the island of Gyara. He later brought charges against Publius Egnatius Celer for the latter's involvement in the deaths of the Stoics Thræsea Paetus and Barea Soranus.⁹⁵ Celer was defended by Demetrius, creating the odd spectacle of a Stoic and Cynic fighting in opposing corners of the court. Musonius's philosophy was resolutely practical and exercised an important influence on Epictetus. In particular it displayed a concern with self-examination and practical training of the sort exemplified by the Sextians that would prove to be such an important influence on Seneca. However, there is no evidence of any direct contact between Seneca and Musonius, or of any indirect influence. The diatribes that have come down to us under Musonius's name are written in Greek, marking a return to Greek as the natural language of philosophy.⁹⁶ The century or so of Latin philosophy

Seneca's own interest in such problems in the *Naturales quaestiones*. However, Demetrius doesn't argue *against* the study of nature, he simply notes that some details may be passed over without great loss: *non multum tibi nocebit transisse, quae nec licet scire nec prodest*.

⁹¹ It seems likely that Seneca knew Demetrius personally, although we cannot be sure; see Griffin 1976: 311 f.

⁹² See Suda s.v. 'Αλέξανδρος Αιγαιῶς = Chaeremon Test. 3 (in Horst 1987: 2). On Chaeremon, see Horst 1987 (containing fragments with facing translation) and Frede 1989.

⁹³ While some have suggested that Chaeremon preceded Seneca in the role of Nero's tutor, others have suggested they held roles concurrently; see Horst 1987: ix and 81.

⁹⁴ On Musonius, see Lutz 1947, containing text, facing translation, and an extensive introduction. Note also Laurenti 1989.

⁹⁵ See Tac. *ann.* 16.21–35.

⁹⁶ Musonius's diatribes are generally thought to be reports made by a pupil, Lucius; see Lutz 1947: 7. We have already noted that of the works of the bilingual Cornutus, the only surviving work is in Greek. Musonius' pupil Epictetus wrote nothing but he lectured in Greek, and his lectures were recorded by Arrian. A little later the Emperor Marcus Aurelius chose to write his *Meditations* in Greek. We might also note the ethical treatise of Hierocles, in Greek, also dating from the Imperial period.

exemplified by Cicero, Lucretius, and Seneca came to an end soon after Seneca's death. Seneca stands as the only Stoic to write in Latin and, indeed, one of the few philosophers of any school in pagan antiquity who tried to do philosophy in Latin.

PART TWO

PHILOSOPHY

Works

DE PROVIDENTIA¹

R. Scott Smith

DATE

As is often the case with Seneca's *Dialogues*, there is no conclusive evidence in *De providentia* by which we may securely date it. The notice of Tiberius at 4.4 (*murmillonem sub Ti. Caesare [...] audivi querentem*) apparently provides a terminus post quem of AD 37, but that is all; supposed discoveries of allusions to later historical events are entirely unpersuasive. Seneca's reference to his presence at one of Demetrius the Cynic's lectures (3.3; cf. 5.5) makes it unlikely that he wrote the treatise in the later years of his exile on Corsica (41–48). Further attempts to narrow down the range or to champion a specific date have been overoptimistic and speculative (cautious remarks at Giancotti 1957: 244–309, Griffin 1976: 396, 400 f.). In particular, critics have attempted to date the work by demonstrating a connection between the content of the essay and events in Seneca's life. If, as has been commonly argued (recently Grilli 2000, adding stylistic arguments), Seneca wrote the *De providentia* as a consolation for his own troubles, it would belong to either the period of his exile or that of his retirement from Nero's court (AD 62–65). Yet, the tone of the work, which is intensely protreptic rather than (self-)consolatory, does not support this thesis.

Several indications, however, support a late date. In addition to *De providentia*, Seneca dedicates to Lucilius two other works, the *Naturales quaestiones* and the *Epistulae morales*, both of which date to the last years of Seneca's life and likely to his retirement (AD 62–65). Seneca's remark at *nat.* 2.46 (*at quare Iupiter aut ferienda transit aut innoxia ferit? In maiorem me quaestionem vocas, cui suus dies, suus locus dandus est*) may be hinting at his designs to write a separate treatise on divine justice (contra, Grimal 1978a: 298–300). As Albertini noted (1923: 41), there is also a correspondence

¹ Commentaries: Viansino 1968, Lanzarone 2008. Studies: Grimal 1950, Abel 1967: 97–123, Andreoni Fontecedro 1972, Dionigi 1994, Grilli 2000. For an overview of Stoic theology see Algra 2003; for Seneca and the problem of theodicy see Fischer 2008: 11–56.

in form and content between the *De providentia* and three late letters (*epist.* 106, 108, 109), in which Seneca similarly deals with specific ethical problems as he prepares to write his all-encompassing *magnum opus*, the *Moralis philosophiae libri*.

CONTENT

We refer to this work as *De providentia*, but this is only a modern convention. Lactantius's copy (*inst.* 5.23.11) bore the title *Quare bonis viris multa mala accidunt, cum sit providentia*. The index and subscription found in the Codex Ambrosianus (11th century) confirm this title. Despite being more cumbersome, the ancient title is more accurate, as Seneca's primary concern is not to provide a general account of Providence but to treat the specific problem of theodicy: why, if the world is governed by a beneficent deity, do bad things happen to (good) people? Seneca himself acknowledges that a discussion of theodicy would best fit within the framework of a broader work on Providence itself, but because Lucilius does not so much doubt as complain about Providence (1.4), Seneca confines his discussion to this narrow topic.

A general overview of the treatise runs as follows:

Prooemium (ch. 1): definition of the topic (1.1); the orderliness of the universe is not accidental (1.2–4); gods are interested in the well-being of good men (1.5 f.).

Narratio (?) (ch. 2): good men are not harmed by *adversa* but consider them exercises in virtue (2.1–3), just as athletes seek adversity to make themselves stronger (2.3 f.) and fathers toughen their sons with trials (2.5 f.); the gods enjoy the spectacle of great men being tried by adversity, for instance Cato (2.7–12).

Propositio and *divisio* (3.1): apparent evils are not actually evils, specifically:

- a) adversity benefits the individual;
- b) adversity benefits the collective;
- c) the virtuous cannot be *miseri*.

Confirmationes (3.2–6.9): divided into three parts, corresponding to the *divisio* at 3.1:

- a) 3.2–4.16 adversity benefits the individual;
- b) ch. 5 adversity benefits the collective and is part of the divine plan;
- c) ch. 6 the virtuous cannot be *miseri*.

The structure as given above essentially follows the interpretation in Grimal 1950, but not all critics are in agreement, nor do all share the view that Seneca's composition is so well balanced and carefully composed (see Dionigi 1994, Abel 1967: 97–123, Albertini 1923: 103 ff.). The disparity of opinion is owed, at least in part, to the great number of amplifications, analogies, *exempla*, and rhetorical devices that often obscure Seneca's progression of thought.

TOPICS

Seneca's essay treats a fundamental problem in Stoic theology, namely how to account for the existence of harmful forces that threaten the well-being of humans in a world governed by a supposedly beneficent deity. If the world is not only governed by, but even composed of a benevolent force, one concerned not only with the whole but also its parts, why is the world constructed in such a way that people, especially virtuous ones, suffer? After all, in everyday experience people encounter many things that one would consider harmful—illness, injury, hunger, and so on. One response to the problem might be to call on the concept of Stoic *indifferentia* (see entry of *De constantia sapientis*), whereby events and actions that are out of our control (or “not up to us”) have no impact on our virtuous state. But it is one thing to argue that illness, loss of a limb, or bereavement do not affect one's virtue, quite another to explain why these dreadful forces exist in the first place if a benevolent Providence is at the helm.

The Stoics acknowledged the existence of forces that were potentially harmful to humans. In an important fragment preserved for us by Aulus Gellius (7.1.1–13 = *SVF* 2.1169 f., Long and Sedley 1987: 54Q), Chrysippus argued that if goods (*bona*) exist, evils (*mala*) too must exist, since nothing can exist without contraries. Later in the fragment Chrysippus specifies how *mala* come into being: they were created not directly by Nature, but as necessary “aftereffects” of the creation of goods (<non> *per naturam, sed per sequellas quasdam necessarias facta dicit, quod ipse appellat κατὰ παρακολούθησιν*). This argument relieves the divine from purposeful generation of evils while accounting for their existence (on Stoic evil in general, see Long 1968; on moral evil in Seneca, see Hine 1995). Seneca too implies that *adversa* (he is keen to avoid the use of *mala*) are part of the natural world order (5.9, 6.6; cf. Cleanthes's *Hymn to Zeus*).

Seneca approaches the problem by arguing that hardships are not cosmic evils, but rather exercises that test, harden, and prove virtue in the virtuous man (*omnia adversa exercitationes putat*: 2.2). He goes even further: virtue *requires* an arena and an adversary in and by which to prove its strength (*marcet sine adversario virtus*: 2.4). In this view Seneca is joined by Epictetus, who (*diatr.* 1.6.32–36) argues that there would never have been a Hercules without such challenges; his valor would never have been known unless there were “such circumstances [...] to make trial of (διέσεισεν) and to exercise (ἐγύμνασεν) him.” According to Epictetus, Zeus (as god/nature) provides us with the means (παράσκειν) and resources (ἀφορμαί) to deal with adversity. This echoes the words of the Stoic *deus* at *prov.* 6.6: *Quia non poteram vos istis subducere, animos vestros adversus omnia armavi* (“Because I could not save you from them [scil. *adversis*], I have armed your minds against all of them”). The good man’s worth is made evident only by hardship; just as fire authenticates gold, so too does adversity authenticate brave men (5.9).

Consistently throughout the work Seneca seeks to emphasize the masculine aspect of the gods’ work, weaving it into the traditional Roman notion of *virtus*. The gods take a “fatherly” disposition toward good men (1.5f., 2.5f.), hardening them with heavy labor and sweat; trainers test athletes with hardship (2.3f., 4.2–4); teachers challenge their students (4.11); gladiators (2.8, 3.4) and soldiers (4.4, 4.7, 4.8, 5.3), whose worth is only proven under adversity, face similar tests. For Stoicism as a masculine philosophy, see also the beginning of *De constantia sapientis*.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

De providentia is among the most impassioned and rhetorically vibrant of Seneca’s dialogues. The treatise is framed as a defense of the gods (*causam deorum agam*: 1.1), a conceit emphasized at the beginning by language borrowed from the courtroom (*particula, contradictio, lis*), repeated later in Seneca’s explicit use of *oratio* (3.1), and culminating in the *prosopopoeia* of the Stoic god himself, which brings the work to a close (6.3–9). Fortuna, too, is personified twice and gives a speech in defense of the Stoic god (3.3f.); on two other occasions we encounter major historical figures speaking (Cato 2.10; Rutilius 3.7). In a work aimed at justifying the works of the Stoic god one is not surprised at the aggressive tone: note the vigorous use of sudden plural imperatives at 4.6 (*nolite, obsecro vos, expavescere*) and 4.9 (*fugite delicias, fugite* [...]), as well as the incredulity expressed at questioning the god’s good intentions: *quid miraris/quid mirum* (2.7, 3.2, 4.12, 4.16, 6.2); *non*

vides (2.5); *numquid* [...] *credis* (4.11); *quidni libenter* (2.12). Seneca deploys rhetorical devices with even greater frequency than usual: *polyptoton* and puns: 1.5 (*dis adversus optimos optimis* and *ut umquam bona bonis noceant*); 2.10 (*alter alterius manu caesi*); others at 3.10, 4.3, 4.11, 4.13, 6.5; anaphora at 2.5 (*numquam* 3×), 2.9 (*ecce* [...] *dignum* 2×), 2.11 (*dum* 3×), 3.5–7 (*infelix est* [...] *felicior esset/felix est* 3×), 3.9 (*documentum* 2×), 4.5 (*unde* [...] *si*) 3×), 4.9 (*fugite* 2×), 5.5 (*vultis* 3×), 6.2 (*quidni* 3×), 6.6 (*contemnite* 4×), and 6.9 (*sive* 4×).

TRANSMISSION

Has the end of *De providentia* been lost in the course of transmission? Critics who view the treatise as incomplete bring to bear a number of arguments: 1) it is the shortest of Seneca's *Dialogi* (save the mutilated *De otio*); 2) it ends abruptly with the end of the *deus*'s long speech and lacks a *peroratio*; 3) not all of the topics announced in the *divisio* (3.1) are treated at length; and 4) the material drawn from *De providentia* in Lactantius (reference *supra*) is not found in the transmitted text. All of these can be accounted for: 1) the treatise is indeed the shortest, but only slightly shorter than *De constantia sapientis*; 2) in an essay so rhetorically charged and with features of diatribe, ending the treatise with the speech of the *deus* is rhetorically forceful—the last word, so to speak; 3) in Grimal's reanalysis of the structure the apparent lack of development has disappeared (nor is consistency always to be expected from Seneca); and 4) the material from Lactantius is not a lost fragment but a summary of the contents, perhaps from memory.

SOURCES

Seneca cites Demetrius the Cynic twice (3.3, 5.5). The latter runs several lines long; perhaps at 3.3 more than one line (thus Reynolds 1977) should be attributed to Demetrius (note *enim* in both instances). He also employs a long passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on the myth of Phaethon (5.10 f.). Perhaps deriving from rhetorical handbooks/schools are the *laudatio Catonis* (2.9–12), the list of suicides corresponding to the elements (6.9), and the long list of historical *exempla* of great men facing adversity (3.4–14: Mucius, Fabricius, Rutilius, Regulus, Socrates, Cato). The same list is found at *epist.* 98.12 f., truncated lists at *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*) 22.3; *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*) 16.1; and *epist.* 67.7, 71.17 (see Mayer 1991: 153 f.). As for philosophical sources, it is impossible to determine which, if any, Seneca employed in composing

De providentia. Two Stoics, Chrysippus and Panaetius, each wrote a *Περὶ προνοίας*, but of the former we have only fragments and of the latter only the title. Nothing in the surviving fragments of Chrysippus's work suggests that Seneca consulted it directly, but the most extensive fragment (cited *supra*) demonstrates that Chrysippus was concerned with the problem of theodicy. Numerous writers treated the topic of Providence: see Epikt. *diatr.* 1.6, 3.17; Aelian, *De providentia* (very fragmentary); Philo, *De providentia* I–II (fragmentary); the six speeches *Περὶ εἰμαρμένης τε καὶ προνοίας* by Dio Chrysostom; and the ten speeches *Περὶ προνοίας* by Theodoretus; cf. the collection of fragments at *SVF* 2.1168–1186.

DE CONSTANTIA SAPIENTIS¹

R. Scott Smith

DATE

The date of *De constantia sapientis* can only be established within a wide range. The mention of Caligula's death (18.1) places it certainly after AD 41; it is also unlikely that Seneca would relate the embarrassing story of Valerius Asiaticus before his death in AD 47 (18.2). The treatise must have been written before the death of the addressee, Annaeus Serenus, reported in *epist.* 63.14 (likely dated to AD 63–64). Beyond this, however, little can be said. *De constantia sapientis* likely predates *De tranquillitate animi* since Serenus is portrayed as not yet a Stoic in the former (3.2) but committed to Stoic principles in the latter (1.10). But since that treatise also eludes dating (perhaps AD 60?), only a relative chronology is possible. If *De constantia sapientis* reflects Serenus's (or Seneca's) concerns as part of Nero's court, a date of AD 54–59 is perhaps called for (Minissale 1977: 9–13, Viansino 1968: 10 f.; Albertini 1923: 31), but such a biographical reading of the text is impossible to corroborate without clear historical allusions, of which there are none.

CONTENT

Although we refer to this essay as *De constantia sapientis* ("On the Steadfastness of the Wise Man") there is no evidence that it was called this in antiquity. The index in the Codex Ambrosianus, the *incipit*, and the *explicit* all transmit the title *Nec iniuriam nec contumeliam accipere sapientem* ("That a Wise Man Receives neither Injury nor Insult"), which is itself drawn from the thesis advanced at 2.1. The term *constantia* does not occur in the essay, so here, as with *De providentia*, we likely have an attempt to shorten a cumbersome title (see Klei 1950: 2–5).

¹ Commentaries: Klei 1950 (Dutch), Viansino 1968, Minissale 1977. Studies: Grimal 1949b, Ganss 1952 (rare): 31–37, Giancotti 1957: 178–192, Abel 1967: 124–146 (cf. 159), André 1989: 1739–1741, 1756–1764.

An overview of the treatise:

ch. 1 (*exordium*²): Seneca argues that Stoicism, though an aggressive, masculine philosophy, is not as harsh as it appears (*captatio benevolentiae*).

ch. 2 (*narratio*): Seneca recalls an earlier conversation with Serenus about the mistreatment of Cato the Younger. Since Cato was a Wise Man, he could suffer neither injury nor insult.

ch. 3f. (*propositio/quaestio*): Serenus objects to this Stoic paradox (3.1f.); Seneca establishes the nature of the question, emphasizing the impervious nature of the *sapiens* through a series of analogies.

ch. 5.1f. (*divisio*) separates *contumelia* from *iniuria*, establishing the general framework for the rest of the treatise.

ch. 5.3–ch. 9 (*argumentatio* I): exposition of proofs that the *sapiens* is impervious to *iniuria*; *exemplum* of the Megarian Stilpo (5.6–6.8)

ch. 10–18 (*argumentatio* II): discussion of *contumelia*, though both *iniuria* and *contumelia* are treated together at 12.3, 13.5, and ch. 15f.; *exempla* drawn from the senate and imperial court (ch. 17f.).

ch. 19 (*peroratio*) Seneca extols the *sapiens* while offering advice for the rest of us *imperfecti*.

TOPICS

At the center of the work stands the Stoic paradox “the Wise Man is not subject to harm,” one of many paradoxes involving the Stoic *sapiens*. The figure of the *sapiens*, that rare—critics would say imaginary—human, perfect in every way, differentiated from god only in his mortality, and impervious to the blows of Fortune, was open to criticism for obvious reasons. How, for example, could a man of flesh and blood be impervious to injury, pain, bereavement, even death? Such is Serenus’s objection, but his criticism of

² Rhetorical divisions following Grimal 1949b; for composition see also Albertini 1923: 75f., 265; André 1989: 1756f.

the seemingly imaginary figure of the Stoic *sapiens* no doubt represents a widespread objection voiced by non-Stoics (cf. 3.3, 4.1, 4.3, 7.1, 7.3, 12.3, 14.2 f., 15.1). Seneca's treatise attempts to vindicate this paradox while making the Wise Man both relevant and meaningful to his audience.

Seneca divides his treatment into two parts, separating *contumelia* ("slight") from the more serious *iniuria* ("injury"), a division he may have found in a source (see below). The distinction, more of degree than of kind, is somewhat artificial, and Seneca stretches to establish a fixed line between the two. His quasi-legal distinction—*iniuria* is subject to redress under the law, whereas *contumelia* is not (10.1)—is found nowhere else in Roman legal texts (see Viansino 1968: 12 f., Minissale 1977: 15 f.), and his philosophical definition, that the *sapiens* feels, yet overcomes *iniuria*, yet does not even feel *contumelia*, is contrived. Yet his insistence on dividing the two topics relates directly to his two rhetorical aims: first, to prove the truth of the paradox; second, to attack Roman softness while giving us the means to keep our sanity in an increasingly hostile world.

The discussion of *iniuria* involves several proofs in syllogistic form establishing the logical incompatibility of the *sapiens* and *iniuria*, that is of good and evil, of greatness and its opposite. Crucial here is the Cynic-Stoic concept of αὐτάρκεια ("self-sufficiency"). The *sapiens*, free from his reliance on externals (19.2), is concerned solely with what he can control, virtue, which in turn is sufficient for happiness. All else—health, status, wealth, even life itself—is relegated to second-order importance as *indifferentia*, or "ethically neutral conditions," which may or may not be preferable (e.g., good or bad health), but which do not affect one's ethical state precisely because they depend on Fortune. Herein lies the key to the paradox: the right-thinking *sapiens* understands that what is subject to Fortune *does not in fact belong to him*, and thus does not value it as highly as do others. Since *iniuria* affects externals, not virtue, they are merely inconveniences (*incommoda*: 16.2), ones which the Wise Man transforms into tests of his own virtue (9.3; cf. *De providentia*).

So far *iniuria*, but what of *contumelia*? One might object that once Seneca has proven that the *sapiens* cannot suffer *iniuria*, it is unnecessary from a purely logical point of view to prove that he cannot suffer the less serious *contumelia*. Indeed, as noted above, whereas the *sapiens* feels the former (10.4), he does not feel the latter. *Contumeliae* are perceived slights due to faulty reasoning (*vitio interpretantis*: 10.3), physical contractions of weak-minded men's souls (10.2 f.), which the right-thinking *sapiens* cannot experience. Even if "greater" men, those supposedly endowed with more power and status, insult the Wise Man, he remains unaffected because of his *magnitudo animi* (= μεγαλοψυχία), "the most glorious of all virtues" (11.1;

cf. 15.2). Certain of his own greatness, his own superiority (Stoicism turns the conventional notions of greatness and power on their heads), the Wise Man treats his would-be insulters as a father would his misbehaving children (11.2) or a doctor his fevered patients (ch. 13). Seneca does not so much prove that the Wise Man cannot suffer *contumelia* as illustrate the mental disposition that allows him to live unruffled by the everyday irritations of life caused by the diseased humanity in Rome. Seneca has thus subtly broadened the scope of the paradox and changed the lens of his rhetoric, focusing less on the *sapiens* than on the pettiness of a certain segment of Roman culture: the *delicati* (5.1, 10.2), those soft, womanly (*muliebria*: 10.3, 19.2; cf. 1.1) types who in the absence of real trials take offence at the most trivial slight. At the same time Seneca has abandoned his esoteric exposition of the Wise Man in favor of demonstrating how one can remain sane in a society of insane people—and how Stoicism can help. *Magnitudo animi* is possible not just for the Wise, but for all philosophically minded people (16.3). Even if we cannot achieve perfection—unlikely given that only one *sapiens* appears every several generations (7.1)—we can train ourselves through philosophy to care nothing about the petty cares of our peers and, unlike the *delicati*, to be strong and tough-minded.³

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

De constantia sapientis, an outgrowth of an earlier conversation between Seneca and Serenus (1.3–2.3, 7.1), is meant to be read as a dramatized snapshot of a philosophical education in progress. Seneca's close relationship with his addressee is evidenced here, as in *De tranquillitate animi*, by a vivid portrayal in the opening chapters: Serenus is painted as a skeptical, passionate young man wrestling with the principles of Stoic philosophy. As Abel (1967: 124–128) has amply demonstrated, Serenus and this earlier conversation are central to the conception and composition of the work.

The work is organized along clear lines, with well marked transitions, but one observes a substantial difference in both language and style in the expositions of *iniuria* and *contumelia*. The treatment of *iniuria*, among the most systematic expositions in Seneca, is composed mainly of esoteric syllogisms (5.3 f., 7.2, 8.1 f., 9.3; cf. 11.2), for which Seneca elsewhere shows

³ Coping with *contumeliae/iniuriae* is a vital part of the therapy of anger found in *De ira* III, which has multiple points of contact with our treatise (see esp. *dial.* 5.25–28, 37).

disdain (*epist.* 85.1, 108.12). Unsurprisingly, then, he soon turns to a lengthy personification of Stilpo as an example of the self-sufficient *sapiens* (5.6–6.8), betraying his reluctance to rely solely on logical proofs to establish his point. By contrast, the section devoted to *contumelia* exhibits more rhetorical vigor, featuring elements of diatribe and drawing from everyday Roman life: children/parents (11.2), sarcastic slaves (11.3), the meaningless games children and adults play (ch. 12), doctors/patients (13.1f.), sordid slave sellers (13.4), attacks on women (ch. 14.1), and difficult household slaves (14.1f.).

When meditating on the *sapiens* Seneca employs striking images; he is beyond the reach of his attackers,⁴ unshakeable and invulnerable,⁵ and all but divine (3.3, 4.2, 6.8, 8.2f., 14.4). Seneca echoes Lucretius's description of the detached happiness of the Wise Man (14.1 = *Lucr.* 2.1–4), and also employs a quote from Epicurus to demonstrate the essential agreement between the two philosophies. Yet, the conceit that Stoic philosophy is a tough, masculine philosophy (as opposed to Epicureanism) is sustained throughout (*virilem* [...] *viam*: 1.1, *duritiam* [...] *Stoicam*: 15.4) and is emphasized by images from the military (3.5, 4.2f., 5.6–6.8, 19.3), athletic and gladiatorial contests (9.5, 16.2), and nature itself (3.4f.). For more on language and style, see Minissale 1977: 18–23.

SOURCES

The paradox of the Wise Man's imperviousness was commonly asserted (*SVF* 1.216, 3.567–581, *Plut. mor.* 1044B), but no full treatment other than Seneca's has survived. It is not among the six paradoxes treated in Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*; Hecato's "On Paradoxes" is lost. An important but short passage preserved in Stobaeus (*Ecl.* 2.7 p. 110 W. = *SVF* 3.578) seems to differentiate ὕβρις ("insult") from a general category of ἀδίκημα ("maltreatment") and may prefigure Seneca's separation of *contumelia* from *iniuria*. Although in the Stobaeus passage ὕβρις does not conform to *contumelia* in all respects (Grimal 1949b: 250f.), there are similarities. Both emphasize the guilt of those wishing to do harm despite the Wise Man's imperviousness to that harm (*dial.* 2

⁴ Note words in *e(x)-* or *a(b)-*: *in editum verticem* [...] *extra omnem* [...] *emineat*: 1.1; *intervallo* [...] *abductus* (4.1); *editissimas arces* (6.4); *excelsa* (6.8, cf. 1.2); *excedentia* (7.1).

⁵ Note adjectives in *in-*: *invictus* (2.1, 5.7, 19.4); *invulnerabile* (3.3); *inexpugnabilis* (3.5, 6.8); [*virtus*] *libera est, inviolabilis, inmota, inconcussa, sic contra casus indurata* (5.4); *indemnem* (5.7); *integrum incolumemque* (6.5); *integra inlibataque* (6.7); *inexsuperabilibus munimentis praecincta* (6.8); *intrepida* (8.2).

[= *const.*] 4.3, 7.3–6, 9.4; cf. *benef.* 2.35) and stress self-sufficiency and virtue as the sole factors in the Wise Man's well-being (*const.* 5.4 f.). The syllogisms in the discussion of *iniuria* point to the Old Stoa, but the priority of *magnitudo animi* in enduring *contumelia* indicates the influence of the so-called Middle Stoa, in particular Panaetius (André 1989: 1740, Abel 1967: 128 f., Knoche 1935; cf. Cic. *off.* 1.61–92 with Dyck 1996 ad loc.).

Seneca relies heavily on historical *exempla*, some of which he may owe to handbooks: Cato (1.3; cf. 7.1, 14.3; *epist.* 14.12–13), Stilpo/Demetrius Poliorcetes (5.6–6.8), Vatinius/Cicero (17.3), Socrates (18.6), and Antisthenes (18.6); cf. Chrysippus at 17.1. Others, such as the story of Corbulo calling Cornelius Fidus, Ovid's son-in-law, a "plucked ostrich" in the senate, he probably experienced first hand (*vidimus*: 17.1); so too the emperor Gaius's conduct toward Valerius Asiaticus, Cassius Chaerea, and Herennius Macer (18.1–5).

DE IRA

Maria Monteleone

DATE

The treatise *De ira* is composed of three books, viz. *Dialogi* nos. III, IV, and V. The only pinpoint for dating the work is a *terminus post quem* corresponding to Caligula's death on January 24, AD 41, as suggested by repeated allusions to this Emperor's violent temper and frequent outbursts (1.20.4; 1.20.5; 1.20.8f.; 2.17.1; 2.20.1; 2.33.3–6; 2.36.3; 3.18.3f.; 3.19.1–5; 3.21.5).¹ Other hints that might determine the *terminus ante quem* do not provide such clear evidence.² Seneca's brother, to whom the treatise is addressed, is still called by his native name, Novatus, instead of his adoptive one, Gallio, which he definitely bore by AD 52–53. Still, the exact year of the adoption is not known to us, and neither is the date of composition of the *De Vita Beata*—the first of Seneca's works in which his brother is addressed as *Gallio*. Also, Seneca's hint at his wife's presence beside him (3.36.3) is no help, as we know nothing about his conjugal affairs. Nor can Claudius's edict, in which he promises to control his temper,³ be accepted as evidence: we do not know when it was issued, and it cannot be ruled out that it was precisely in response to Seneca's *De ira* that Claudius publicly admitted his being affected by such passion, and declared himself willing to mitigate it.

CONTENT

Seneca's *De ira* begins with a declaration of its author's alleged aims: "You have asked me, Novatus, to write on how anger can be mitigated." An introductory chapter follows, providing a phenomenological description of anger: among passions (*adfectus*), it is both the fiercest and the least human-like, so that

¹ Notably 2.20.1, 2.17.1, 2.36.3 find confirmation in Suet. *Cal.* 50.8, 53.2, and 50.3, respectively.

² For an overview, see Herrmann 1937: 95 f.; Coccia 1958: 34 f.; Giancotti 1957: 93–150; Cupaiuolo 1975: 28–52; and Grimal 1978a: 270–276.

³ Cf. Suet. *Claud.* 38.1.

many philosophers view it as some short-lasting insanity (*brevis insania*), beyond self-control and inaccessible to reason's advice (*rationi praeclusa*). Even the appearance (*habitus*) of people consumed by anger reveals their insanity: just as animals make their looks more ferocious when about to attack, so people who are becoming irate (*irascentes*) show clear symptoms of insanity (*furentium certa indicia*) all over their body, which appears to be deformed (*deforme*) by passion. Among different *adfectus*, wrath is the most dangerous for mankind, bringing ruin upon whole communities as well as individuals: it is "craving to take revenge of an offence" (*cupiditas ulciscendae iniuriae*), "to punish the one whom we think has done us wrong" (*cupiditas puniendi eius a quo te inique putes laesum*); it can turn relatives and fellow citizens into enemies, and kings into tyrants. A distinction is made between *ira*, being a *brevis insania*, and *iracundia*, which is a constant inclination toward *ira*. The problem is then tackled as to whether anger has natural origins, and whether it can be of some use (1.5–21). Confronting the Aristotelian and peripatetic view that properly restrained *ira* may even be useful, Seneca holds it to be a passion against nature: in his view *ratio* and *ira* are, respectively, the change of the soul for the better and the worse, so that the former never needs the latter and can succeed in everything by itself.

Book Two (especially 2.1–4) examines the process through which the *adfectus* of *ira* arises: the impression of having been wronged (*opinio iniuriae*) determines a first non-voluntary motion (*primus motus non voluntarius*) in the *animus*, a surge of indignation; next, the *animus* recognizes by a rational and willful act (*iudicium*) that such an impression is justified and approves (*adsensus*) the necessity of repaying the offence (*punire, ulcisci, dolorem reddere, vindicare*); *ira* then bursts out with an attack (*impetus*) aiming to take revenge (*ultio, poena*).

The treatise next (esp. 2.18–36) proposes a prophylactic method to avoid falling prey to anger (*de tuenda valetudine = ne incidamus in iram*): young people should be shielded by proper education, while adults must get into the habit (*consuetudo*) of not believing in *opinio iniuriae* and not bestowing *adsensus animi* on it—that is, they must convey passion's *primus motus* into a *motus rationi parens* by means of a *iudicium aequum* that should assess whether an offence has really taken place. If so, the *iudicium aequum* should impose a correct evaluation of those responsible (*facientes iniuriarum*), never forgetting that "no one of us is without blame" (*neminem nostrum esse sine culpa*) and that revenge is pointless, because *poena* is of some use only if it can prevent a *scelus* from being accomplished, and not when it comes later.

Book Three is dedicated to what may properly be called therapy for anger (*de restituenda valetudine = iram excidere animis aut refrenare*), once it has

made its way inside a man's soul. First of all, attacks must be prevented by reasonable behavior and the company of *amicissimi*, in order to preserve the mental equilibrium (*tranquillitas animi*) that is needed to restrain the insurgencies of passion. If preventive therapy does not work, anger can be restrained in many ways by reasoning and by recourse to *aequum iudicium*: *opinio iniuriae* can at first be confronted with a different view, when the causes of *iniuria* appear to be insignificant (*levia*); if the crisis has reached a further stage, one must take his time (*se differre*) and fight against himself (*pugnare secum*) to prevent anger from bursting out (*exilire*). Most of all, the thought of mankind's common destiny, the awareness that death will soon make the same of us all, is the tool that will eradicate wrath from one's soul, bringing him to neglect *iniuriae* and not to delight in other people's suffering.

TOPICS

Among the most controversial issues of Seneca's *De ira* has always been the problem concerning its compositional structure. Most scholars have agreed—albeit on different grounds—on the work's lack of unity, stressing the substantial autonomy of Book Three, deemed to be either a much later addition to Books One and Two or a separate and independent work (the latter view was backed by Pfennig 1887, Rabbow 1914, Albertini 1923, Nikolova-Bourova 1975, and Castiglioni 1924, while Mueller 1912, Bourgerly 1922a, Coccia 1958, Abel 1967, Boal 1972, Grimal 1978a: 410–424, Fillion-Lahille 1984: 283–290, and Ramondetti 1996 argue for unity despite the uneven composition).⁴

It cannot be denied, however, that in all three books Seneca devotes special attention to some definite themes, which makes the whole theoretical construction more solid and consistent. An outstanding place is taken by physiognomics (a very popular theme among Stoics, see Cupaiuolo 1975: 91, Evans 1950, and Ramondetti 1996: 56 f., 67 f.), as becomes evident in the three different descriptions of the angry man (1.1.3 f.; 2.35.2–5; 3.3–4.3): *deformatas animi*, entailed by anger as a worsening of one's soul, is reflected in *deformatas corporis*. Anger is described in terms of decay, as some sort of deviation from good qualities, moral (*ira* = deformation of *animus*, collapse and loss of *ratio*) as well as bodily (*ira* = ugly, animal appearance; disease).⁵

⁴ For a critical review of different positions, see Cupaiuolo 1975: 67–87 and (more recently) Ramondetti 1996: 9 f.

⁵ Comparisons of the angry man with the enraged beast (in the extreme case of a *furens* tyrant, Seneca actually uses the word *feritas*), with sick people (first and foremost insane

Such deviation from the natural condition of man—i.e., from the norm—is viewed by Seneca in a basically “interactional” perspective: *ira* does not only affect the angry person, it is the kind of passion that displays itself and its worst effects on the level of human relationships. Seneca actually describes anger, the desire of repaying an offence, as a perverted model of the mechanism of reciprocity between men:⁶ anytime *ira* intervenes in the relationship between two subjects, instead of the proper exchange of mutual services (*officia*, *beneficia*, *mutuus amor*, *fides*, etc.) another is triggered, that of offence and punishment. An immediate consequence is the reversal of the normal terms of relationships, so that anger “prevents anybody falling prey to it from remembering what his own duties are: you infuse it in a father, he becomes a foe; in a son, he becomes a parricide; in a mother, she becomes a cruel stepmother; in a fellow citizen, he becomes an enemy; in a king, he becomes a tyrant.”⁷ Indeed, it is the tyrant whom Seneca most frequently portrays as the representative par excellence of angry people, the one displaying most evidently what dangers may be engendered by this passion to the human race. The emphasis on the figure of the king who, blinded by anger, cannot make the punishments he inflicts on his subjects fit the gravity of their crimes and is therefore unable to administer justice in a rational way, has led some scholars (Cupaiuolo 1975: 7–17, Fillion-Lahille 1984: 278–282, and Viansino 1992: 119 f.) to think that the work may actually be addressed to Claudius, or to rulers in general: Seneca warns them not to yield to passion as did Caligula, who turned himself into a bloodthirsty tyrant of the “oriental” fashion and an example of how a Roman emperor should not behave.⁸ Seneca’s representation of the *tyrannus*, as well as his remarks on the subversion of the social order that is brought about by anger, have triggered a profitable reflection on the relationship linking our treatise to Seneca’s tragedies, above all *Thyestes* (see especially Staley 1975 and 1981–1983; also Abel 1985a: 765).⁹

people), or with those categories (women, children, the elderly) who possess a lesser share of *ratio* compared to adult men, all obey the same logic.

⁶ For a discussion on the mechanism of reciprocity and mutual damage in general, see Courtois 1984; on Seneca and *De ira* especially, see Guastella 2001: 9–30.

⁷ *Quemcumque obtinuerit, nullius eum meminisse officii sinit: da eam patri, inimicus est; da filio, parricida est; da matri, noverca est; da civi, hostis est; da regi, tyrannus est* (1.3. fr. 3a).

⁸ It should be noted (Nikolova-Bourova 1975, Fillion-Lahille 1984: 274–278, and Viansino 1992: 120) that *De ira* already contains the theoretical basis of Seneca’s later work *De clementia*.

⁹ “Il personaggio di Atreo rappresenta una così metodica applicazione del meccanismo illustrato da Seneca nel *De ira*, che si sarebbe tentati di leggere il *Tieste* col commento dello stesso trattato” (Guastella 2001: 31).

the pattern of anger sketched in the former seems to provide the background on which the latter's intrigues are constructed. Tragic characters actually seek revenge obeying the same logic that we find outlined in *De ira*: the uncontrollable urge for retaliation, which is engendered by suffering *aniniuria*, causes the affected person to cross the threshold of rational behavior and to attempt revenge with a totally disproportionate *iniuria*—that *aliquid maius* that is neither *poena* nor *castigatio*, but definitely *scelus*—in order to appease the *dolor* inflicted on him by the suffered *iniuria* (Guastella 2001: 15f.).¹⁰

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Among Seneca's works, *De ira* is perhaps the one in which the author's rhetorical training and declamatory practice are most evidently displayed, affecting the rhetorical pattern that underlies the whole treatment of the subject (*propositio*, *argumentatio*, *conclusio*): style, which is expressive and in constant pursuit of effect, and language, which is rich in figures of speech and *variationes*. Seneca also draws on the tradition of cynic-stoic diatribe, which becomes particularly evident in his neglect of the rules of *decorum*, in his brilliant style, which aims to impress the reader, and in his unusual language, which straddles tradition and renewal.¹¹

SOURCES

When Seneca wrote *De ira*, he probably had at his disposal, in addition to treatises on the passions in general,¹² works devoted specifically to wrath by Theophrastus, Antipater from Tarsus, Posidonius from Apamea (generally deemed to be Seneca's main source), Philodemus from Gadara, and Sotion from Alexandria. At least, he knew of such works, although in some cases only indirectly.¹³

¹⁰ The application of this mechanism in Seneca's tragedies is discussed at length in Guastella 2001: 9–154.

¹¹ On the language and style of *De ira*, see Coccia 1958, Cupaiuolo 1975: 118–161.

¹² Works *On passions* were written by Stoics such as Zeno, Chrysippus, Ariston from Chios, Herillus, Hecaton, Posidonius from Apamea, and Sotion; by Xenocrates, an Academic; and among Peripatetics, besides Aristotle, by Theophrastus and Andronicus from Rhodes.

¹³ For discussion in detail on the sources of *De ira* see Fillion-Lahille 1984, Cupaiuolo 1975: 88–106, and Viansino 1992: 122–137.

Seneca explicitly mentions Aristotle and Theophrastus,¹⁴ without precise reference to their work, to disclaim (especially in 1.5–21) some statements of theirs, first of all that anger is a natural phenomenon and might prove very useful if kept under reason's control.¹⁵

It is precisely in the diatribe against Peripatetics that *De ira* betrays its author's loyalty to the Stoic tradition, which considered reason to be fully enabled to act only if free from passion, and which condemned anger as being "against nature," therefore denying that it might be of any use in any occasion. Book One appears to reflect Chrysippus's "orthodox" Stoicism, acknowledging only the rational part of the human soul and regarding the passions as some sort of insanity (allowed by perverted reason), which is impossible to restrain and which must be eradicated. Books Two and Three, on the other hand, are affected by Posidonius's more realistic views and less strict rationalism, reckoning with the existence of instinctual reactions that reason cannot control, although they are not properly called "anger", and devoting greater attention both to an investigation of the causes and to therapy, which is centered on education, patience, and practice.

As far as prophylaxis is concerned, there can be little doubt that Seneca was influenced by Sextius, whom he explicitly mentions in connection with exercises to be practiced every day—inner self-examination and looking in the mirror to see how passion disfigures one's outer looks (2.36.1 f., 3.36.1).

Seneca was also most likely well aware of the treatise written by Philodemus from Gadara, the Epicurean philosopher, with whom he shares both the perception of anger as some ruinous evil for mankind—a sort of insanity that must be cured—and his denial of the usefulness of passion; their views diverge concerning the nature of anger, deemed by Philodemus (and by Epicureans in general) to be a natural and ineluctable phenomenon, which ought to be accepted and kept under control, rather than altogether suppressed.

The consonance between the attacks on Peripatetics in Book Four of Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes* and those in Seneca's *De ira* is better explained by supposing that both drew on the same sources (viz. Chrysippus and Posidonius), rather than that the latter depended directly on the former.

¹⁴ Aristotle in 1.9.2, 1.17.1, 3.3.1; Theophrastus in 1.12.3, 1.19.3.

¹⁵ However, a comparison is usually drawn with remarks made by Aristotle on this subject in *De anima*, *Ethica Eudemia*, and, most of all, in *Ethica Nicomachea* and the second book of *Rhetorica*. For exact references, see Cupaiuolo 1975: 94–96, Fillion-Lahille 1984: 203–210, and Viansino 1992: 125–127.

TRANSMISSION

In *Ambrosianus* C no. 90, the eleventh-century codex preserving the *corpus* of Seneca's *Dialogi*, the beginning of *De ira* is missing up to *tamquam* (1.2.4).¹⁶ Section 1.1–2.3 was restored by a twelfth-century corrector (a) on the only page he wrote (14^r, in Beneventan writing). A lacuna still exists (between *capitis damna<tos>*, 1.2.3, and *tamquam*, 1.2.4, where the *Ambrosianus* begins), which is usually patched with an epitome written by Martin from Braga in the sixth century (viz. 1.3.3 from *ira omnia* to *tyrannus est*)¹⁷ and a quotation from Seneca in Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, 17 (viz. 1.3.3b, from *ira est* to *nocere voluit*).

RECEPTION

Seneca's *De ira* enjoyed considerable success among Christians in Late Antiquity;¹⁸ notably, it seems to have provided an important theoretical basis for both Arnobius's *Adversus Nationes* and Lactantius's *De ira Dei*. The former author seems to have drawn on Seneca's text in many passages of his work, for example, where he describes anger, its pernicious effects on the affected person, and the ruinous consequences of its displays, or when he depicts divinity as some being of higher nature, remote from passions and constant in virtue—in the mold of Seneca's conception of the Stoic wise man.¹⁹ Lactantius reutilizes *De ira* in an even more conspicuous way, deliberately and systematically drawing from Seneca's treatise the building material for his *De ira Dei*, and adjusting it to suit his own needs. On the one hand, he acknowledges Seneca's merits as a moralist, and as being particularly close to the Christian mentality; on the other, he sharply criticizes him every time he appears to stray from this mentality.²⁰ Nothing is heard about the text from the sixth century—when Martin of Braga composed his own *De ira* by summarizing the Senecan one—until the eleventh, when the *Codex Ambrosianus* turned up in the abbey of Montecassino. Some excerpts from

¹⁶ For relevant information about the manuscript tradition of *De ira*, see Reynolds 1968: 357, 368 f., Idem 1977: xii, 41, Idem 1983: 367, and Ramondetti 1999: 75 f.

¹⁷ On Martin's intervention, see Bickel 1905a: 535, 541 f. and Barlow 1937: 29–31.

¹⁸ See Traina 1987: 46–49, 195–198 for an overview of studies on Seneca's *Fortleben*, and notably 171–192 for his influence on Christian writers.

¹⁹ For an overview of similarities (including those in form and style) between these two texts, see Mastandrea 1988: 12–33.

²⁰ For a strict comparison between the two works, see Lo Cicero 1991: 1242–1261.

the first two books of *De ira* can be found in a collection of *sententiae* drawn from the *Dialogi*, which circulated in France and England in the twelfth century under the title *Proverbia Senecae per ordinem alphabeti disposita*.²¹ In the fourteenth century, *De ira* was the only one among the *Dialogi*, along with *De tranquillitate animi*, to appear in Thomas de Hibernia's *Manipulus florum*.²²

²¹ For discussion, see Reynolds 1968: 360, Idem 1983: 367f.; Brugnoli 2000a: 230f.; and Munk-Olsen 1987: 163, 213.

²² Munk-Olsen 2000: 171f.

CONSOLATIO AD MARCIAM

Jochen Sauer

DATES

The *Consolatio ad Marciam* is addressed to the daughter of the senator and historian Cremutius Cordus; although three years have passed she is still in deep mourning over the loss of her son Metilius. The date of the dialogue is much debated. The only traceable *terminus post quem* is Marcia's renewed publication of her father's works (1.3). Most scholars follow Suetonius (*Cal.* 16.1), who says that this event took place during the reign of Caligula, i.e., not before March AD 37 (Lana 1955: 88 f., Giancotti 1957: 72 f., Abel 1958: 610 and 1985: 705 f.).¹ For the *terminus ante quem* most scholars are in favor of the beginning of Seneca's exile in AD 41. In this case the *Ad Marciam* could be the earliest of the preserved prose works of Seneca. Dating the consolatory address to the period of the exile (AD 41–49) leads to problems with 16.2 (*in qua istud urbe, di boni, loquimur?*) and with the description of the exile in 17.5 (Abel 1985a: 705, Bellemore 1992: 219 f.); dating it to the period after the exile leads to problems concerning Marcia's age (2.2 f.; Abel 1985a: 705, Griffin 1976: 397, Fabbri 1977–1978: 316 f.). In view of the liberal tone of the piece the first months of Caligula's reign would appear to be a most probable date for the composition of the work (Abel 1967: 159 f. and 1985: 705 f., opposed only by Griffin 1976: 397).

SOURCES

Our knowledge of Seneca's predecessors in the genre of consolation literature is not sufficient to allow us to identify with certainty definite models. Plausible conjectures have been made suggesting Krantor's *Consolatio*, the

¹ Only Bellemore 1992, casting doubt on Suetonius's reliability, places the renewed publication in the late Principate of Tiberius (AD 34–37). In her argumentation she refers to the generous praise of Tiberius and to the fact that neither Caligula nor Claudius is explicitly mentioned. The problem with this date is that we would have to disregard our only direct *testimonium* (Suet. *Cal.* 16.1).

prototype of the genre (Pohlenz 1906: 336, Favez 1928: xxvi, Stowell 1999: 15–20), and also Cicero's *Consolatio*. A strong influence of the latter is likely, especially in the choice of examples and in the use of arguments from different philosophical schools (Helm 1939: 130 f., Abel 1967: 15 f.). The recognition of possible lines of tradition is made difficult by the fact that visible parallels in thought often turn out to be commonplaces or *topoi* that are specific to the genre of consolation (cf. Gieseke 1891, Claassen 1999: 19–26). The fact that many thoughts and arguments can be traced back to the repertoires of different Hellenistic schools of philosophy confirms the strong influence of the tradition of the genre where elements from rhetoric and popular philosophy abound (Grollios 1956, Kassel 1958). Regarding the choice of philosophical statements Seneca seems to show “a readiness to take help where it is offered” (Grollios 1956: 63 f.). The background, however, to his *weltanschauung* is undoubtedly the Stoic doctrine² (Abel 1985a: 711, Stowell 1999: 43). The undogmatic use of this, orientated toward the inward guidance of the addressee, is illustrated by the mild version of the *apatheia* ideal (*nec te ad fortiora ducam praecepta*: 4.1). One aspect worth mentioning is the striking similarity between the final sections of Seneca's consolation and Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (Armisen-Marchetti 2007).³

TOPICS AND CONTENT

In contrast to the other two consolatory pieces, the *Ad Marciam* belongs firmly to the paramythetical genre. The main aim, the overcoming of pain, dominates the text (Abel 1967: 19 f.). The choice and sequence of the arguments, however, seem to have been adapted to the character and mood of the addressee. Accordingly, the consolation begins with a piece of instruction by means of *exempla* (1–3), and this is followed by the *praecepta*. The beginning of the work is focused on Marcia's personal *exemplum* on the occasion of her father's suicide. By the re-publication of his works, writes Seneca, she has saved him from “real” death. The following *exempla*, Octavia and Livia, present protreptic and apotreptic models (cf. Shelton 1995). We then have philosophical statements from various sources as well as the lessons of experience on the transitory nature of mankind (5–11); these show the unnatural quality of excessive mourning.

² On the philosophical significance of the consolatory works within Seneca's oeuvre and the character of their thought in general, cf. Setaioli (*infra*, pp. 241–244).

³ Cf. Smith (*infra*, p. 359).

As is frequent in the literature of consolation, the selfish reasons for mourning (12.1–19.2) and the unselfish ones (19.3–25.3) are introduced in succession (Grollios 1956: 17 f., Abel 1967: 16). This is done by considering first Marcia's situation (refutation of the selfish reasons) and then Metilius's (refutation of the unselfish reasons). Seneca gives the final words of the consolatory piece to Marcia's father: the deceased Metilius, since he is now all knowing, is happy (26).

RESEARCH

One of the focal points of research is the examination of the structure of the piece on the basis of rhetorical and psychagogical considerations. The main point for Abel (1985a: 712) is the development of the motif "condicio humana," whose major characteristic is subjection to death. In the four-stage development of this motif (9–11, 17 f., 20.1–3, 25 f.) he perceives a "crescendo,"⁴ which is intensified to the point of a "fortissimo" with Cremutius Cordus's entrance (Abel 1985a: 712).⁵ The ostensible contradiction between the recommendation of Peripatetic *metriopatheia* and Stoic *apatheia* as the suitable attitude of the soul is resolved by means of a persuasion strategy, with the help of which the addressee (and the reader) is led imperceptibly step by step to the desired attitude of *apatheia* (Abel 1967: 21 f.). It is not Seneca's goal to soften Marcia's grief, but to achieve an end of it (Stowell 1999: 44). At the same time, it should be borne in mind that mourning itself, which for a certain duration was accepted (and indeed expected) in Rome, stands in contradiction to the strict observance of the *apatheia* ideal. To this ideal both the addressee and reader must first of all be gradually brought (Shelton 1995: 174). There are also numerous other elements in the presentation, e.g., the choice of *exempla* that are particularly close to Marcia (Shelton 1995), and these reveal Seneca's skill in the psychagogical shaping of the piece to suit the needs of the addressee.

Many arguments turn out to be familiar topoi of philosophical or rhetorical origin such as abound in the rhetoric of declamation (De Vico 1969: 139 f.). There are in addition some direct reminiscences of certain philosophers and

⁴ The central significance of "crescendo technique" as a principle of composition in the tragedies is noted by Steidle 1944: 257.

⁵ According to Stowell 1999: 103, Seneca "first tries to dismantle Marcia's mistaken assent and impulse to grief. At 19.1, he announces the shift in consolatory direction" towards seeing what needs to be healed, and then, how it can be healed.

works.⁶ However, recognizing these as such is in no way a precondition to understanding the text: these reflections will readily be understood both by the learned and the ordinary reader (Fillion-Lahille 1989: 1611).

The question of a possible political intention behind the *Ad Marciam* has aroused the interest of some scholars. In mentioning Cremutius Cordus and the recovery of freedom of thought, Seneca, it is said, wishes on the one hand to exercise some influence on the young ruler Caligula (Borgo 1978: 71f.). On the other hand, taking up a position against Sejanus is interpreted as a desire to obscure an earlier connection with the latter (Stewart 1953, Fillion-Lahille 1989: 1613f.). When he praises Tiberius, he is detaching him from Sejanus, too, and putting himself firmly in the position of a loyal subject of the emperor. This has at times led to a charge of opportunism being leveled against Seneca.

The prominent *exemplum* of Livia has continued to attract attention. Here, it is said, Seneca wants to keep before our eyes the picture of Augustus as the ideal ruler (Galdi 1928: 220f.). It may be, however, that Seneca means to flatter Caligula by praising his great-grandmother (Lana 1955: 88f.). On the whole, however, in view of our insufficient knowledge of the conditions of the period, a certain restraint with regard to political interpretation would seem to be advisable (Abel 1985a: 711).

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

In comparison with the other two *consolationes* the *Ad Marciam* reveals, both in matters of content and style, a closer connection to the rhetoric of declamation. Among the many features characterizing the style of this *dialogus* we may mention the abundance of the *exempla* given, the intensity of the exhortations, the recurring questions, the insertion of direct speech from the lips of fictitious persons, who frequently answer the questions of the main speaker (De Vico 1969: 140f.).

A noticeable feature is the absence of a *partitio*. In its place there are several signpost expressions, which ensure a clear structuring of thought (12.1, 17.1, 19.3) and produce an impression of relaxed, easy-flowing speech (Abel 1967: 53f.),⁷ very different from the style of the consolatory piece *Ad Helviam*.

⁶ In 32.2, for example, Plato's *Phaidon* (64A, 67D) is quoted indirectly.

⁷ Cf. Tac. *dial.* 19.1f.

TRANSMISSION

The fundamental facts about the transmission of the text are to be found in Reynolds (1968 and 1977). The basis of the tradition is the *Ambrosianus* (Reynolds: A), together with a group of manuscripts (Reynolds: g), the best of which are independent of A and, although less reliable than the *Ambrosianus*, still preserve a useful tradition of the archetype.

DE VITA BEATA¹

Fritz-Heiner Mutschler

DATE AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF COMPOSITION

Concerning the date we are better off with *De vita beata* than with the majority of Seneca's *dialogi*.² The first hint is provided by the name of the addressee, Seneca's elder brother Novatus, who as an adult was adopted by the rhetor Iunius Gallio. Since Seneca addresses him as Gallio, the adoption is the *terminus post quem* of the essay's composition. Unfortunately, it cannot be dated more precisely than to the years between the composition of *De ira*, in which Seneca addresses his brother still as Novatus and which presupposes the death of Caligula (AD 41), and Gallio's proconsulship in Achaia (AD 51–52; cf. Act. Ap. 18.12 f.). Other considerations, however, allow us to further narrow the time of composition. The author obviously lives in great state and has influence and power (cf. esp. 2.4). This seems to exclude both the years of Seneca's exile (AD 42–49) and the years after his retirement from the court (AD 62–65) and, perhaps, to suggest that *De vita beata* came into being after the accession to power of Seneca's alumnus Nero (AD 54) and before the beginning of the estrangement between the emperor and his teacher (AD 59). Such a date is further supported by Tacitus's report on a trial of the year AD 58 (*ann.* 13.42 f.) in which the accused, P. Suillius, directed exactly the kind of reproaches toward Seneca against which the philosopher defends himself in the second half of *De vita beata*. This does not mean that the essay is a direct response to Suillius's accusations,³ but it shows that Seneca's situation in the years between AD 54 and 59

¹ Commentaries: Grimal 1969, Viansino 1992, Kuen 1994; Studies: Pohlenz 1941 (1965), Ferguson 1958, Dahlmann 1972, Fuchs 1973, Griffin 1976 (1992): 286–314, Strohm 1985, Esposito 1988, Abel 1989 (1995), Chaumartin 1989a: 1686–1698, Asmis 1990, Mutschler 1990, Günther 1999, Blänsdorf 2005.

² Cf. Gercke 1895 (1971): 299–306, Albertini 1923: 31 f., Pohlenz 1941 (1965): 77, Giancotti 1957: 310–362, Grimal 1969: 17–21, Griffin 1976 (1992): 309 f. and 431 n. 2, Grimal 1978a: 293 f., Viansino 1992: 97–100, Kuen 1994: 21–24.

³ As Gercke 1895 (1971) has it.

and in particular in or around AD 58 would provide a fitting background for the essay's composition.⁴

STRUCTURE

The introductory paragraph (1.1) has been interpreted as an announcement of a division of the essay into two parts: the first dealing with the goal of human beings, *beate vivere*, the second with the path to achieving this goal (Grimal 1969: 7 and 82). This suggestion has been rejected for good reasons (Stroh 1985). When Seneca wants to give indications as to the disposition of a text he marks them clearly as such. That *De vita beata* is composed of two main parts is, nevertheless, correct, but it is divided in such a way that the first part is devoted to determining both the *vita beata* and the conditions of its realization (1–16), while the second is concerned with the problem of the relation of philosophical teaching and personal life (17–28). To which extent the two parts cohere is a matter of debate. On the one hand, it cannot be denied that the emphasis shifts from the philosophical issue of the definition of the *vita beata* to a defense against personal attacks (on philosophers in general and Seneca in particular).⁵ On the other hand, the problem of wealth, which is at the center of the second part, is also of importance within the more general question of what constitutes a happy life.⁶

The internal subdivision of the two parts blurs the bipartition of the whole because in both of them Seneca works with small units of one or two chapters' length,⁷ which are connected with each other not in a strict logical sequence, but in a relatively free train of thought.⁸ Thus, after the introduction of the theme and a first approach *ex negativo* (1.1–3.1) there follows a series of definitions of the *vita beata* or the *beatus*, each of which links up with the preceding one and at the same time introduces a new aspect (3.2–6.2). Chapters 5 and 6 connect the definitions with a discussion of the objection of an epicurean interlocutor and thus form a transition to the next

⁴ This is now the opinion of the majority of scholars. For a more pessimistic view, see Giancotti, op. cit.

⁵ This shift has been noted by all commentators.

⁶ For other connections cf. Griffin 1976 (1992): 308–310.

⁷ See, e.g., the surveys in Albertini 1923: 76–78, Mutschler 1990: 199–201, Kuen 1994: 15–18, and Günther 1999: 25–28.

⁸ For interpretations of the dialogue, which follow this train of thought step by step, see esp. Pohlenz 1941 (1965) and Abel 1989 (1995). The examination of the logical coherence of the text is the main interest of Günther 1999.

sections in which the dispute with Epicureanism (and possibly with other doctrines, too) is in the foreground, while here and there new definitions are added (7–16). The second part is structured similarly. Short sections of one or two chapters follow one another, discussing first more general reproaches of disagreement between philosophical teaching and personal life (17–20), then more specific objections against the wealth of philosophers (21–24.4), before at the end Socrates, in an effective prosopopoeia, takes up the defense of the wise man and the repudiation of his opponents (24.4–end).

TOPICS

The subject of the essay is the *vita beata*. How does Seneca define it? What is his philosophical position on this issue? Concerning his affiliation to one of the philosophical schools Seneca leaves no room for doubt. Already in the first chapters he states that he is writing as a Stoic, though reserving the right to his own opinion (3.2, cf. Kuen 1994: 365 f.). This statement is valid: Seneca's position is the Stoic one, but individual accents are discernible.

According to the orthodox Stoa, happiness (εὐδαιμονία) consists in ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν or ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν. Independently of whether both formulas go back to the founder of the school, Zeno, or only the shorter one stems from him and was supplemented by his successor, both mean the same: that happiness consists in the internal unity and harmony of a life, and that for achieving it accordance with nature is the necessary and sufficient condition. In full agreement with this doctrine, Seneca states: *beata est ergo vita conveniens naturae suae* (3.2) and *idem est ergo beate vivere et secundum naturam* (8.2) and later speaks of the internal unity and harmony of such a life as well (*animi concordia, consensus, unitas*: 8.6).

The divine principle effective in nature is, for the Stoics, λόγος, *ratio*, reason. From this it follows that a life that is supposed to correspond with nature must be directed by reason. Seneca shares this point of view: *potest beatus dici, qui nec cupit nec timet beneficio rationis* (5.1, cf. also 5.3, 6.2, and 8.2).

The area in which reason must above all prove itself is the judgment of goods. The position of the Stoa is clear, if somewhat complex. The only real good is moral goodness, that is, virtue, the only real evil is moral badness, that is, vice. All other things are neutral (ἀδιάφορα, *indifferentia*). Thus, a good life, in principle, must be directed toward *virtus* as the only good. However, the founder of the school already made certain distinctions within the domain of neutral things, some of which we are by nature disposed to prefer to their

opposites. Correspondingly, the reasonable man, whenever moral goodness and badness are not at stake, will decide for the preferable things (προηγμένα, *praeposita*) against their opposites (ἀποπροηγμένα, *reiecta*).

Seneca adopts this view without restriction. He stresses repeatedly that the *vita beata* will be realized only by those who consider virtue the only good, vice the only evil, and all other things neutral: *summum bonum est animus fortuita despiciens, virtute laetus*; [...] *beatum dicamus hominem eum, cui nullum bonum malumque sit nisi bonus malusque animus* [...] (4.2). On the other hand, he states several times that the reasonable man will strive for the preferable things, without binding himself to them: *beata est ergo vita* [...] *corporis sui pertinentiumque ad id curiosa non anxie*, [...] *aliarum rerum quae vitam instruunt diligens sine admiratione cuiusquam* [...] (3.3, cf. also 8.2, 21.2, 23.4, and 26.3).

Thus, Seneca's statements are in general firmly based on orthodox Stoic doctrine. Individual accents are discernible with respect to two points. On the one hand, the emphasis placed on harmony, joy, and cheerfulness as components of the happy life is striking: *hunc* [scil. *animum*] *ita fundatum necesse est, velit nolit, sequatur hilaritas continua et laetitia alta atque ex alto veniens* (4.4, cf. also 3.4).⁹ This seems to be in contradiction to Chrysippus's doctrine that "virtue and reasonable sensation and reasonable drive and such are always present in all reasonable men; joy, however, and cheerfulness neither in all reasonable men nor always." (Stob. II.77.6 f. = SVF III.113). The least one can say is that Stoic doctrine was not uniform with respect to this point and that the intensity with which Seneca points to joy as a necessary component of the *vita beata* is in tension with other Stoic statements.

Something similar can be observed with respect to the problem of wealth, with which the second part of the essay is to a large extent concerned.¹⁰ Apparently, the older Stoa qualified wealth simply as a προηγμένον without discussing it further, while representatives of the middle Stoa, like Diogenes of Babylon, Antipater of Tarsos, Panaetius, and Posidonius, seem to have treated the pertinent questions in more detail and emphasized the positive aspects of wealth more strongly. The Seneca of *De vita beata* is clearly closer to the latter and possibly goes further than they do: the statement that wealth

⁹ Cf. Pohlenz 1941 (1965): 58 f., Asmis 1990: 233 f., Mutschler 1990: 191 f.

¹⁰ See the detailed discussion of Seneca's views on wealth in Griffin 1976 (1992): 294–314. Griffin points out both the closeness of Seneca's position in *De vita beata* to the teachings of people like Panaetius and Posidonius and its uniqueness in comparison with Seneca's other writings.

makes the wise man cheerful *ut navigantem secundus et ferens ventus, ut dies bonus et in bruma ac frigore apricus locus* (22.3) is singular in his own writings and did probably not have many parallels in other Stoic texts.¹¹

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

In terms of literary form, *De vita beata* is a typical Senecan *dialogus*. It is not a sober scholarly treatise as are, for example, the preserved works of Aristotle. But it is different from Plato's or Cicero's philosophical dialogues, with their imitation of real conversations, too. Instead, *De vita beata* is an essay of a middle scale, which treats its topic in a sequence of small sections and forces upon the reader a few basic ideas with penetrating persuasiveness. One important device of this persuasiveness is the technique of repetition with variation. It serves to make the fundamental points over and over again in new constellations and with new emphases and thus to imprint them on the soul of the reader as deeply as possible. The long series of definitions of the *vita beata*, which starts at 3.3, is a good example. Language and style, too, are directed toward psychagogical effect. Instead of long, well-balanced periods, there are mostly short, aphorism-like sentences; easily understandable parataxis has preeminence over logically differentiating hypotaxis; punch lines, antitheses, and—sometimes bold—metaphors lead again and again to impressive formulations. In addition, there are numerous objections by an anonymous interlocutor, which add piquancy to the text and keep the essay going. And, finally, historical examples, often presented in anecdotal form, and prosopopoeiae give distinctness and emphasis to what is said.¹²

¹¹ There is another point where Seneca may have put in a special accent by taking up the ideas of Panaetius. In his very first definition of the *vita beata*, he speaks of a life *conveniens naturae suae* (3.2). Asmis 1990: 224 f. understands the *suae* as referring not to nature in general, but to each person's individual nature—as it is taken into account in Panaetius *persona*-doctrine (cf. Cic. *off.* 1.107 f.). She then interprets several features of *De vita beata* (as, e.g., the emphasis on joy and the justification of wealth) in this context, that is as adaptations to Seneca's particular personality. This interpretation of *suae*, however, is less than certain and is not shared by many scholars.

¹² All these devices are described, with lists of instances carefully documented, in Kuen 1994: 407–435.

SOURCES

Seneca was, of course, well versed in Stoic literature (and in that of other schools, too). But in spite of the fact that the commentaries, for many passages of the essay, point out parallels to the writings of earlier Stoics (and of other schools, too), practically none of them is specific enough to prove a reference to one particular text. In the chapters that deal with the definition of the *vita beata*, that is, with the central topic of ancient ethics, this is not surprising, as this topic was treated not only in the writings of individual philosophers, but in compendia and handbooks as well.¹³ But this is also the case with the second half of the essay, which is concerned with the more specific problem of the proper attitude toward wealth: although it is clear that here the doctrines of the middle Stoa were of particular importance for Seneca, we are in no better position to determine specific dependencies.

In *De vita beata* Seneca quotes passages of Roman poetry on four occasions. Both the selection and the kind of usage are typical: three quotes from Vergil (8.3: *Aeneid* 2.61; 14.4: *Georgics* 1.139; and 19.1: *Aeneid* 6.653) and one from Ovid (20.5: *Metamorphoses* 2.328); in all four cases Seneca isolates the citations from their original contexts and uses them in his own sense (Kuen 1994: 426–428, Tarrant 2006: 3).

TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION

The end of *De vita beata* presents one of the grave problems of transmission in Seneca's *dialogi*. Although the index of works in the Codex Ambrosianus contains the entry AD ///// DE OTIO, a work bearing this title is not found in the manuscript. Following the suggestion of Muretus, Lipsius, in his edition of 1605, proposed in chapter 28 a lacuna after *cir* and attributed what follows to (mutilated) *De otio*. This division of the two texts has found general approval among editors. The implication is that the end of *De vita beata* and the beginning of *De otio* are missing. As to *De vita beata* it is improbable that much has been lost. The prosopopoeia of Socrates gives a powerful ending to the *dialogus*, and it is difficult to imagine that after this Seneca once again spoke in his own name.

¹³ How difficult it is to determine the reference text(s) of a passage of Seneca can be seen from the ongoing discussion concerning chapter 15: It seems clear that Seneca is treating here the doctrine of another school, different from the Garden, with which he disagrees. But no consensus has been reached as to which school this is (cf. esp. Pohlenz 1941 [1965]: 62 f., Grimal 1967a, and Chaumartin 1989a: 1694–1697).

DE OTIO¹

R. Scott Smith

DATE

The incomplete state of the text and the lack of any historical allusion make dating *De otio* speculative. In the absence of certainty critics have either conjectured specific dates from a biographical reading of the text or have attempted to establish a relative chronology based on the philosophical evolution of the addressee, Annaeus Serenus (to whom both *De constantia sapientis* and *De tranquillitate animi* are also dedicated). With the latter approach we are immediately confronted with a problem: Serenus may not be the addressee. Nowhere in the surviving fragment is the addressee identified, and the name in the index of the Codex Ambrosianus has been effaced. If Serenus is the addressee—perhaps indicated by the “ardent and stubborn” personality exhibited by the interlocutor, reminiscent of the other works dedicated to him (Griffin 1976: 354 n. 2; but see Dionigi 1983: 55–57)—two conclusions may be drawn: 1) a relative chronology of *De constantia sapientis*—*De tranquillitate animi*—*De otio* may be established based on Serenus’s conversion from Epicureanism to Stoicism, and 2) *epist.* 63 (dated to AD 63–64), in which Serenus’s death is reported, becomes a *terminus ante quem*.

It is also commonly argued that *De otio*, with its encouragement to retire from public affairs, reflects Seneca’s political position vis-à-vis the court of Nero, i.e., around his retirement in AD 62. The preponderance of critics, drawn to this biographical approach, incline toward this position, but even within this large group opinion differs whether to view *De otio* as a prelude to his withdrawal from politics, as an ensuing defense of it, or as a concurrent document illustrating his reasons for it (see Dionigi 1983: 49–53). Parallels

¹ Commentaries: Williams 2003, Dionigi 1983; Studies: André 1989: 1744–1747, 1772–1778, Schwaborn 1951; *De otio* and political participation, Griffin 1976: 315–366 (*De otio*: 328–334); *otium* in Seneca and Roman thought, Dionigi 1983: 66–77, André 1962, 1966, Grilli 1953; Stoics and choice of life, Joly 1956: 143–147.

with the letters, esp. *epist.* 7, 8, and 68, argue for a late date, but Seneca may be returning to a topic treated many years earlier (see Giancotti 1957: 225–243, Griffin 1976: 316 f.).

TRANSMISSION AND CONTENT

The index of works in the Codex Ambrosianus includes an entry *ad [...] de otio* (as noted above, the name has been erased), but this work is nowhere found under a separate title in the manuscripts. In 1585, Muretus detected an inorganic suture in *De vita beata* 28 and posited that the material from there to the end was a fragment from another work. Lipsius, in his 1605 edition, separated this fragment from the preceding dialogue and added the title *De otio aut secessu sapientis libri pars*. What survives is a fragment of a text that is mutilated both at the beginning and the end.

How much is missing from the beginning of *De otio* we cannot say for certain, but it is unlikely to be much. The opening lines have the color of an *exordium*; at 1.4 Seneca portrays an interlocutor raising a lengthy objection (a technique found early in other dialogues), and at 2.1 we have a formal *divisio*—all of which suggests that we are not too far along when the transmitted text begins. A reasonable speculation is that at most a few pages have been lost. For a host of reasons most hold that *De otio* is incomplete at the end (though see Dionigi 1983: 42–48). Given the shortness of the work (only 8 OCT pages) and the unlikelihood that the initial lacuna is extensive, it is probable that we have lost much of the end of *De otio*, perhaps, as Griffin notes (1976: 332), as much as half of the work.

An overview of the work follows:

Ch. 1 (*exordium*): Seneca urges withdrawal from the vicious crowd into *otium* (1.1–3); an unnamed interlocutor (Serenus?) objects that this violates the Stoic principle of an “active” life (1.4).

Ch. 2 (*divisio*): After asserting his independence from his Stoic predecessors (1.5), Seneca sets out to prove his position is in fact orthodox, dividing his discussion into two *probationes*: one may choose *otium* 1) from an early age before entering public life (*a prima aetate*: 2.1), or 2) after a long career of public service (*emeritis stipendiis, profligatae aetatis*: 2.2).

Ch. 3 f.: Seneca first sets out a summary of the reasons (*causae*) why a Stoic might opt out of public service (ch. 3; cf. 6.1–4, 8.1–end), then seeks to

establish positive arguments for withdrawal (ch. 4 f.): first, there are two *res publicae*, the local (*minor*) and the cosmic (*maior*), the latter of which is served better *in otio* (4.2); second, Nature has fashioned us for contemplation in addition to action (ch. 5).

Ch. 6f.: Contemplation is not inactive: the *exempla* of the three Stoic scholars, Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus, prove that one can better benefit humankind *in otio* than by participating in government (6.4 f.). In fact, all philosophical schools involve contemplation to some degree (ch. 7).

Ch. 8: The *lex Chrysippi* allows for a *vita otiosa* if the *res publica minor* is not suitable (8.1). Close scrutiny reveals none is worthy of a *sapiens* (8.2); with the surprising statement that *otium* is necessary for all (8.3) the text ends awkwardly with an unanalyzed analogy.

TOPICS

At the center of this treatise stands a fundamental question: what is the appropriate life for a Stoic philosopher to lead? Although the Stoics' position on this is by no means monolithic, they advocated political involvement *in principle*. Seneca reports their basic position: "the Wise Man will engage in politics unless something prevents him" (3.2; cf. Diog. Laert. 7.121). Despite their advocacy of an active life, the Stoics recognized that in certain conditions one might justifiably opt out of a public life. But since the Stoic principle of political engagement converged with Roman cultural norms—after all, the élite were expected to lead a political life—Stoicism, in the view of the typical Roman, became a byword for political participation. When set against the position of its rival philosophical school, Epicureanism, which espoused a purely private life (though in fact many Epicureans did engage in politics), the popular view was reinforced: Stoicism stood for the active life (*negotium*) in polar opposition to the Epicurean easy life of indolence (*otium*).

Against this cultural backdrop, the (imaginary) interlocutor's criticism of Seneca's call to a *vita otiosa* is understandable but fundamentally misguided (cf. *epist.* 68.10). In rebuttal, Seneca himself provides a list of circumstances when the Wise Man will not participate in public affairs (3.3): 1) if the state is too corrupt to be helped and beset by evil men; 2) if he does not have sufficient influence or power to be effective; and 3) if he is in ill health. Thus, both Epicureanism and Stoicism allowed for a life of *otium*, though for

different reasons; for the former it was an intentional choice (*ex proposito*), while for the latter it was a response to conditions (*ex causa*), like a temporary haven in a storm (7.4).

Seneca then sets out to prove that *otium*, far from necessarily being equal to a sedentary life of pleasure, can in fact be active—provided that one moves from a narrow view to a cosmic perspective, one bounded neither by space nor time (see Williams 2003: 10–12). There are two *res publicae* (4.1f.), the lesser (one's local community), and the greater (the cosmos). One may work to benefit either or both, but Seneca argues that one can better serve the greater republic *in otio*, for there one can contemplate the fundamental questions of the universe and help *all* of humankind (cf. *dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*].3.3), not just those of our time and place. Such contemplation conforms to the more fundamental Stoic principle underlying political participation, that one will seek to benefit other humans and society at large (3.5). Indeed, the Wise Man will only retire into *otium* “in the knowledge that even then he will be performing actions through which he will benefit future generations” (6.4; cf. *epist.* 8.2). By expanding our view to encompass the entire cosmos, we realize that *otium* allows us “to set future generations straight and to hold court not with just a few but with all men of every nation, both those now and those to come” (6.4), just as the great Stoic philosophers had done (6.4f.). Of course, in perfect conditions contemplation is to be tied directly to action (6.2f.; cf. Cic. *off.* 1.153f.), but when the situation demands it, the Wise Man will withdraw in order to expend his efforts to some good end, that is, in serving the *maior res publica*.²

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Although one of Seneca's more theoretical works, *De otio* is varied in terms of style and register, ranging from rigorous, logical argumentation in the body of the treatise (esp. 3.2–5, 4.1, 5.1, 7.1–4) to flights of poetic fancy (e.g., 5.2–8) and rhetorically vibrant displays at the fragment's beginning and end (1.1–4 and the *interrogatio* at 8.2). The opening chapter, imbued

² By tying contemplation to action Seneca is fully in line with the type of life advocated by the Stoics. At Diogenes Laertius 7.130 we find that, among the contemplative life, the active life, and rational life (*bios logikos*), the Stoics preferred the last since humans, as rational animals, were created by Nature both for contemplation and action (cf. Cic. *off.* 1.15–17, *fin.* 2.40; Seneca, *Otio* 5.1, *epist.* 94.45; Plut. *lib. educ.* 7f–8a). Posidonius (fr. 186 E.-K.) directly ties *contemplatio* to the *telos* (goal) of human life.

with political/electoral language (see Ingrosso 1988), vividly emphasizes the detrimental effect of the fickle crowd with frequent rhetorical devices: anaphora (*tunc potest*: 1.1; *aliud ex alio*: 1.2); antimetabole in isocolon and homoeoteleuton (*petita relinquimus, relictā repetimus*: 1.2); and correctio (1.3, twice). The rhetorically forceful language continues with the interlocutor's imagined response (*sermocinatio*), beginning with staccato questions (*quid agis, Seneca? deseris partes?*: 1.4) and ending his objection with powerful alliteration with plosives and sibilants: *quid nobis Epicuri praecepta in ipsis Zenonis principiis loqueris?* [...] *si partium piget, transfugis potius quam prodis?* Seneca similarly uses *sermocinatio* at *dial.* 2 (= *const.*).3.1 to establish a conventional opinion as a starting point and later in *De otio* to mark transitions and to raise obvious objections (6.1, 6.5, 7.2), as often elsewhere (e.g., *dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].2.1, 5.9, 6.1, 6.6; *dial.* 2 [= *const.*].1.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3, etc.).

Throughout the work Seneca seeks to minimize the differences between Stoicism and Epicureanism as part of his rhetorical strategy to redefine *otium* (3.2 f., 6.1, 7.1 *deposita contentione, depositoque odio*). In the long series of physical, theological, and ethical questions at 4.2, 5.5 f. (which neatly reflect the very act of *contemplatio*), he places both Stoic and Epicurean theories side by side without prejudice, employing Lucretian language liberally (e.g., *gignuntur* [...] *diducta et solidis inane permixtum*; *dei sedes*: 4.2, *gravia descenderint, evolaverint levia*: 5.5). At 5.6 the personification of human *cogitatio* "bursting through heaven's walls" (*caeli munimenta perrumpit*) recalls Lucretius's encomium to Epicurus (1.70–79, esp. *effringere ut arta | naturae primus portarum claustra cupiret*: 70–71).

SOURCES

Given that Seneca strongly asserts his intellectual independence (1.5, 3.1), that no early Stoic text on political participation has survived completely intact, and that the topic was often debated in Greco-Roman rhetorical circles (Cic. *top.* 82, *de orat.* 3.112; Sen. *epist.* 14.13 f.; Quint. *inst.* 3.5.6–8; cf. Cic. *Att.* 9.4.1 f.), it is difficult to judge whether, or the extent to which, Seneca drew on specific sources. Chrysippus's Περί βίῳν ("On the Kinds of Life") may have been influential, probably indirectly through some intermediary. Although attributed to Zeno at 3.1, the Stoic principle of political participation may properly belong to Chrysippus, who articulated precisely this position in the first book of his Περί βίῳν (Diog. Laert. 7.121). At 8.1 Seneca examines the *lex Chrysippi* that permits one to choose a *vita otiosa*, although what follows is attributed to Stoics (*nostri*) in general (cf. *epist.* 68.2), and the

discussion breaks off with the end of the text. For Stoic exceptions to political participation (3.3) we rely mainly on testimony from the so-called Middle Stoa and later: see especially Arius Didymus (*SVF* 3.690); cf. Cic. *off.* 1.71–73 and 107–121 (the four *personae*, presumably translating Panaetius); Sen. *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).6; Epikt. *diatr.* 2.6.9; see also Dionigi 1983: 79–86. The content of chapter 5, concerning humankind's innate desire for knowledge, ultimately derives from Aristotle's lost *Protrepticus*, though not directly nor necessarily through Antiochus of Ascalon, as Dionigi (1983: 86–95) suggests based on close similarities to Cic. *fin.* 5.48–52.

DE TRANQUILLITATE ANIMI¹

Fritz-Heiner Mutschler

DATE AND ADDRESSEE

The genesis of this dialogue can be dated only to a relatively extended period between Seneca's return from exile in AD 49 and the death of its addressee, L. Annaeus Serenus, which occurred probably some time before AD 62 (cf. Griffin 1976 [1992]: 447 f.). Several interpreters take the dialogue to reflect more precisely Seneca's situation around AD 60 when, after the murder of Agrippina, the philosopher was already considering his retreat from the court.² But with the text giving no specific indications of Seneca's circumstances, this is only a conjecture. The data of the public career of the addressee—*amant en titre* of Nero's mistress Acte in 55 (Tac. *ann.* 13.13.1) and *praefectus vigilum* probably from 55 until his death (Griffin loc. cit.)—do not help us either (Giancotti 1957: 165).

That the relationship of Seneca and Serenus was a close one is indicated by the address *carissime Serene* (4.1 and 17.12) and confirmed by Seneca's confession that he lamented the death of his friend immoderately (*epist.* 63.14). *De constantia sapientis* and (possibly) *De otio* are addressed to Serenus as well. As to the relative chronology of the three dialogues, it is mostly assumed that *De tranquillitate animi*, in which the friend appears as a Stoic *proficiens*, is preceded by *De constantia sapientis*, in which he seems to show epicurean inclinations, and followed by *De otio*, in which his Stoicism is consolidated. However, other theses have been argued as well.³

¹ Commentaries: Cavalca Schirotoli 1981, Viansino 1992, Lazzarini and Lotito 1997, and Parenti 2004; Studies: D'Agostino 1929, Barigazzi 1962, André 1989, Maurach 1991: 123–135, Abel 1992 (1995): 3–36, Motto and Clark 1993a, Blänsdorf 1997, Lefèvre 2003, and Nocchi 2008.

² Münscher 1922b: 61, Albertini 1923: 37–39, Pohlenz 1941 (1965): 98, Lana 1955: 252, André 1989: 1730, Motto and Clark 1993a: 134, and Lefèvre 2003: 164.

³ Grimal 1978a: 286–293; Williams 2003: 16.

CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

Among Seneca's dialogues, *De tranquillitate animi* stands out by its beginning, as it starts with a long statement of Serenus (1), to which the rest of the dialogue represents Seneca's answer. People have spoken of a letter of Serenus, but there is no formal indication of this.⁴ Rather, for once in the *dialogi*, Seneca's vis-à-vis is a partner with a voice of his own.

The subject of Serenus's utterance is his state of mind. It is characterized by his inability to keep to his intentions, by a continuous back and forth in the orientation of his life. His request is for a remedy against this *fluctuatio* and for the means to achieve *tranquillitas* (1.17). In his first response, Seneca asserts that Serenus is already on the way to recovery (2.1f.). He determines the state of mind toward which his friend is aiming more precisely (2.3f.) and announces that he will investigate a means of achieving it in a way that Serenus can select what he considers appropriate for himself. Beforehand, however, Seneca gives his own description of the *vitium*, in order to enable everyone to recognize his or her own version of it (2.5–15).

With the beginning of Chapter 3, Seneca starts his elaborate treatment of the various means of help, which extends to the end of the dialogue. The disposition of the main part of *De tranquillitate animi* has caused some discussion. Several suggestions have been made,⁵ but no agreement has been reached. This has its reason in the text, not in the idiosyncrasies of its interpreters. As in other writings of Seneca, the structure is one of variation and addition rather than of hierarchical order. Thus, it is unproblematic to distinguish small units of a few chapters, but difficult to point out more general structural principles.

Seneca starts out by discussing critically Athenodorus's advice to retreat from public life when difficulties arise (3–5). Next, he accentuates the need, before undertaking some business, to examine (a) oneself, (b) the task, and (c) the people with whom and for whom one is going to act. The following sections deal with the disruption caused by possessions (8f.), elaborate on adequate behavior in difficult situations (10.1–4), and treat the problem of desires (10.5–7). Shortly after the middle of the *dialogus* Seneca introduces—as nonaddressee of his text—the *sapiens*, which leads him to a description of the wise man's being unperturbed by strokes of fate and a discussion of the

⁴ Cavalca Schioli 1981: 9 f., Maurach 1991: 123 f., Abel 1992 (1995): 13 f.

⁵ See, e.g., Albertini 1923: 279–282, André 1989: 1765, Maurach 1991: 129 f., Abel 1992 (1995): 11–13, Lefèvre 2003: 155.

value of the *praemeditatio malorum* (11). Referring to what has been discussed before, Seneca insists on the necessity of avoiding useless tasks (12 f.). The next section is mainly concerned with the mind's independence from all that is external; this independence is illustrated with several examples, the most extensive being that of Canus Iulius in his confrontation with Caligula (14). As the right attitude toward the shortcomings of the *vulgus*, Seneca advises placid acceptance and composure (15). A graver problem is that of the (seemingly) evil end of good men, which dissipates, however, on closer inspection (16). In the last section, Seneca points out the advantage of being natural (17.1 f.) and the value of finding the right balance between sociability and solitude (17.3), exertion and relaxation (17.3–7), and sobriety and intoxication (17.8–11) before he concludes his presentation with the admonition that *intenta* and *assidua cura* is necessary if *tranquillitas* is to be obtained (17.12).

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Its unsystematic nature and cumulative structure distinguish *De tranquillitate animi* from the other dialogues only in degree, not in principle. One observes here the influence of the Hellenistic-Roman diatribe and of declamatory rhetoric as it developed in the early imperial period. In both genres the aim is less to convince the audience by coherent logical argumentation than to affect and impress it by the application of multiple devices of—partly popular—rhetoric.

Though the formal exchange with Serenus is restricted to the first two chapters—later on the friend is addressed only two more times (4.1 and 17.12)—and the “you” of the text becomes that of the general reader, bits of direct speech repeatedly enliven the text. Thus, in Chapter 11 there are statements in *oratio recta* of the imagined *sapiens* (11.3), Fortuna (11.5), and the *animus* (11.9), and Chapter 14 presents, on the whole, no fewer than nine instances of direct speech. Another means of attracting the reader's attention is *imagery*.⁶ Pointed formulations, be they antitheses or simple *sententiae*, enliven the text throughout. Furthermore, it contains many quotations from both the writings and sayings of prominent people.⁷ Finally, *De tranquillitate*

⁶ See the extensive treatment by Armisen-Marchetti 1989. Cf. also Nocchi 2008: 71–100, esp. 87–93 on imagery connected with the sea.

⁷ 3.2–8: Athenodorus; 8.7: Diogenes; 9.5: Livy; 11.4: Cicero; 11.8: Publilius Syrus; 13.1: Democritus; 14.3: Zeno, Theodorus; 15.4: Bion; and 17.10: *Graecus poeta*, Plato.

animi is full of *exempla*:⁸ Greek (Socrates: 5.2–4, 16.1, 17.4 et al.), Roman (Cato minor: 7.5, 16.1, 16.4, 17.4, 17.9 et al.), and others (like Croesus: 11.12), presented individually or in groups, simply named or elaborately evoked (cf. in particular Canus Iulius: 14.4–10).⁹

TOPICS

“*Tedium sui*.” *De tranquillitate animi* opens with one of the most impressive passages of Seneca’s writings, a twofold description of the problematic state of mind of which Serenus wishes to be cured by Seneca. The description uses the ethical and psychological categories of contemporary school philosophy¹⁰ and illustrates the phenomenon both with reference to the social realities of its time¹¹ and by a number of unusual images, which give the text a specific flavor.¹² Most striking is, however, the long series of terms by which the phenomenon in question is characterized (*animi infirmitas*: 1.4; *bonae mentis infirmitas*: 1.15; *fluctuatio*: 1.17; *fastidium [sui]*: 2.5; *sibi displicere*: 2.7; *animi iactatio, cunctatio vitae*: 2.8; *taedium et displicentia sui, animi volutatio, sui tristis et aegra patientia*: 2.10) and which finally lead to the climax *fastidio esse illis coepit vita et ipse mundus et subit illud tabidarum deliciarum “quousque eadem”* (2.15).¹³

“*Tranquillitas animi*.” Already within the first part of his description of the *vitium* in question Seneca outlines the positive goal toward which the therapy is directed (2.3 f.). This small section is interesting for two reasons. First, although the formulation *non concuti* (2.3) seems to refer to Stoic ἀπάθεια or ἀταραξία, the following reference to Democritus’s more inclusive and less definite εὐθυμία shows that Seneca avoids confining himself to a single, strictly defined Stoic concept and tries to secure for his key term *tranquillitas animi*,

⁸ On both quotations and *exempla*, cf. Nocchi 2008: 101–125.

⁹ Canus Iulius represents one of the *exempla* from Seneca’s own time, which are supposed to show the reader that exemplary behavior is still possible in the present (cf. Mayer 1991: 152).

¹⁰ Serenus distinguishes types of *vitia* (1.1), calling his present *habitus* a *vitium* (1.2). Seneca, too, speaks of a *vitium* (2.5) and contributes to its analysis by discussing the problem of the *cupiditates* (2.7–10).

¹¹ Cf. Serenus’s description of his indecisiveness with respect to life style, public engagement, and intellectual and literary activity (1.4–15) as well as Seneca’s reference to the phenomenon of travel addicts (2.13 f.).

¹² 1.2: Serenus ~ patient between illness and health, 1.17: Serenus’ psychic state ~ *nausea*, 2.1 f.: Serenus’ *affectus animi* ~ tremor of the calm sea after a storm.

¹³ Cf. André 1989: 1767: “Sénèque a donné un vocabulaire à la pathologie mentale, au malaise de l’âme.”

which he presents as a translation of εὐθυμία, a more comprehensive meaning (Hadot 1969: 136). Second, *tranquillitas* denotes a certain state of mind. On the other hand, shortly afterward Seneca programmatically asks the question: *quomodo animus semper aequali secundoque cursu eat propitiusque sibi sit* [...] (2.4). That means that the problem is not simply how to reach a momentary state of mind, but how to gain and permanently retain inner satisfaction by leading one's life in a proper way. For this reason it is understandable that the major part of the *remedia*-section consists of a series of "miniature-treatises" (André 1989: 1769) dealing with concrete problems of how to arrange one's life.

"*Vita activa*" and "*vita contemplativa*." The problem that is treated first and most extensively is that of the relation between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. This topic concerned Seneca repeatedly and his attitude toward it changed according to the changing circumstances of his life.¹⁴ Here, he discusses critically the views of Athenodorus Calvus (3–6). Whereas Octavian's teacher too readily advised retreat from public life, should difficulties arise, Seneca pleads for more persistence and for a retreat only step by step if no other possibility is left. The difference is one of degree, but the example of Socrates under the oligarchy of the Thirty is evoked with force (5.1–3), and the idea that the wise man may serve the "greater republic" of mankind better in retirement (*De otio* 4.2) has not (yet) been formulated.

"Right mixture". In the section on the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* Seneca already suggests that the *optimum* might be the right mixture of both (4.8). In the last chapter of the dialogue, the idea of the right mixture is taken up and further developed. Seneca suggests an alternation between *solitudo* and *frequentia* (17.3), but he advises in particular a proper balance between *intentio* and *remissio* of the mind: after effort and strain the *mens* / *animus* must be granted the proper measure of relaxation, be it in the form of joking and playing, of a walk or trip, or even of intoxication, provided it occurs in moderation (17.4–9). And, as Seneca—hardly in agreement with Stoic orthodoxy—adds, at times one must be out of one's mind if something truly sublime is to be achieved (17.10f.).¹⁵ The end of the dialogue responds in a peculiar way to its beginning: what Serenus had perceived as a painful symptom of his disease is now—in reflected form—presented as a means of curing it (Blänsdorf 1997: 88–91).

¹⁴ For detailed discussions see Griffin 1976 (1992): 315–366, and Günther 1999: 113–172.

¹⁵ The passage is also of poetological interest (cf. Schiesaro 1997b: 98f., and Schiesaro 2003: 21f.).

SOURCES

In the case of *De tranquillitate animi* we are in the rare position of knowing a concrete “source text”: In the passage in which Seneca points out that *tranquillitas* is a translation of the Greek εὐθυμία he also states that there is an “outstanding” book on the subject by Democritus (2.4). In view of this reference, it is more than probable that Seneca used this *volumen* directly, even if there was a Περί εὐθυμίας by Panaetius, too, which Seneca does not mention, but which Cicero refers to and quotes from in his *De officiis*.¹⁶ The assumption of direct use is confirmed when Seneca quotes Democritus literally in 13.1, perhaps with the opening sentence of Περί εὐθυμίας. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that he used Panaetius as well. Another source text explicitly referred to is a treatise of Athenodorus Calvus, which Seneca reports and criticizes extensively in his discussion of the problem of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* (3–5).

Less clear is Seneca’s debt in the broad exposition of the *vitium* to be cured at the beginning of the work, but it is obvious that in some passages of the final parts of Books 3 and 4 of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* (3.1006 is quoted in 2.14) just as in some passages of Horace’s *Odes* (cf., e.g., 2.16 and 3.1) and *Epistles* (cf., e.g., 1.8 and 11) we discover a strand of tradition that Seneca knew of and that inspired him.

There are a number of other quotations in the dialogue that do not come from thematically related texts, but simply show that Seneca was well-read and knew how to insert a quotation at the right time and in the right place (see, e.g., 11.4: Cicero, 11.8: Publilius Syrus, and 17.10: Aristotle).

TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION

De tranquillitate animi is transmitted as part of Seneca’s *dialogi* and shares with its partners the specific situation of transmission of this corpus. There are two particular problems. First, given that the *INCIPIT* of the dialogue in the Ambrosianus is written by another hand, where the first hand had left a space of two lines, it is possible that the very beginning of the work, which may have introduced the antilogy of chapters 1 and 2, has been lost together with the missing end of the preceding *De otio*. Second, the passage

¹⁶ The question of sources is discussed in D’Agostino 1929, Hadot 1969: 135–141, Grimal 1978a: 141–146 and 344–353, André 1989: 1741–1744, Viansino 1992: 207–214, Abel 1992 (1995): 7–11, and Blänsdorf 1997, 75–77.

considerandum [...] *labor est* in 7.2 does not seem to be in its proper place, but to have been displaced here from somewhere in 6. As to its original position, several suggestions have been made, the most probable being between 6.2 and 6.3.¹⁷

RECEPTION

De tranquillitate animi is a case where we can trace the influence of a text of Seneca in a precise historical context of some significance. This context is the discussion and analysis of the phenomenon of *ennui* in nineteenth-century France. At the center of this complex we find Charles Baudelaire (Bouchez 1973: 85), in whose *Fleurs du Mal* the figure of *l'Ennui* looms large in the introductory poem *Au Lecteur*. As a note in his *Journaux intimes* indicates,¹⁸ Baudelaire's conception of *ennui* might have been influenced, at least indirectly, by the portraits of Serenus by Seneca and of Stagirus by John Chrysostomus¹⁹ found in the essays of the doctor and psychiatrist Alexandre Brierre de Boismont.²⁰ Both portraits play an important role in these essays²¹ and together with Cassian's descriptions of *tristitia* and *acedia*²² also appear elsewhere in the extensive debate about the *mal du siècle*.²³

¹⁷ Cf. Albertini 1923: 184–186, Reynolds 1977: ad loc., Cavalca Schiroti 1981: 35 and 85, and André 1989: 1733.

¹⁸ *Fusées IX*: “Brierre de Boismont. / Chercher le passage: *Vivre avec un être qui n'a pour vous que de l'aversion* [...] / Le portrait de *Sérène* par *Sénèque*, celui de *Stagyre* par *saint Jean Chrysostome*. / *L'Acedia*, maladie des moines. / *Le Taedium vitae*” (Oeuvres complètes, ed. C. Pichois, Paris 1975, vol. 1.656).

¹⁹ *Ad Stagirium a daemone vexatum*.

²⁰ Cf. Clapton 1931, Bouchez 1973: 27–32 and 84–91, and Mandelkow 1999: 261–271.

²¹ *De l'ennui* (1851) and *Du suicide et de la folie suicide* (1856).

²² *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium vitiorum remediis*, Books 9 and 10.

²³ Cf. Mandelkow 1999: 115–128, 255–285.

DE BREUITATE VITAE¹

R. Scott Smith

DATE

From 18.5 (*modo modo intra paucos illos dies quibus C. Caesar perit*) we know that Caligula was dead when Seneca wrote *De breuitate vitae*. On the basis of *modo modo* Lipsius (1615) dated the treatise to the early 40s, but since the phrase does not necessarily imply immediacy, this argument cannot be sustained. This is especially true if the addressee, Pompeius Paulinus (likely Seneca's father-in-law), was *praefectus annonae* at the time of writing, as seems certain. Although Seneca does not identify this specific position, all indications point in this direction: Paulinus "managed the accounts of the whole world" and "understood the accounting of the public grain supply" (18.3; cf. 18.4 f.). If this is correct, the historical record allows for two periods when Paulinus could have served in this capacity, 1) AD 48–55 or 2) AD 62–71. Scholars have generally fixated on two dates within these periods, AD 49 and AD 62, when Seneca's political situation could allow him to advise Paulinus to retire without appearing hypocritical. Such attempts to tie Seneca's essays to his own political situation are, as always, dubious; it would hardly have been hypocritical for Seneca, even at the height of his political involvement, to advise a close family member of somewhat advanced age—perhaps 60 or older—to retire from such a demanding position.

Even so, arguments in favor of AD 62 are much weaker than those for AD 49 (overview: Griffin 1962). Critics who champion 49 usually point to a terminus ante quem suggested by Seneca's failure to mention Claudius's extension of the *pomerium* to include the Aventine (13.8), which on inscriptional evidence is securely dated to his ninth tribunate (January 49–January 50). The argument that Sulla was the last to extend the *pomerium*, however, is not

¹ Commentaries: Williams 2003, Traina 1984, Grimal 1959, Dahlmann 1949, Duff 1915. Studies: Abel 1965, André 1989: 1738–1739, 1747–1756, Blänsdorf and Breckel 1983, Dionigi 1995a, Giancotti 1957: 363–445, Griffin 1962, Grimal 1949a, 1960, Hambüchen 1966. Seneca on time: Gagliardi 1998, Armisen-Marchetti 1995b, Goldschmidt 1979 (205–210 on *Brev.*).

Seneca's own but is attributed to a learned pedant, who, as Griffin has well argued (1962: 108–111; *contra* Abel 1965, Hambüchen 1966: 26–81; response by Griffin 1976: 401–407), is asserting the *illegality* of Claudius's extension of the *pomerium*. Thus, the passage establishes not a terminus ante but a terminus post quem of AD 49. Griffin's arguments to this end are persuasive; her contention, that *De brevitae vitae* is Seneca's public apology aimed at providing Paulinus the means to resign his post gracefully to make way for Faenius Rufus in AD 55, is attractive but cannot be corroborated. On balance, a date between AD 50 and AD 55 seems likely.

CONTENT

De brevitae vitae, one of Seneca's most loosely organized treatises, relies not on a rigorously structured plan but, on a constellation of ideas orbiting around a central theme (Albertini 1923: 258–260). Attempts (Grimal 1959, 1960) to give a detailed analysis that presupposes rhetorical divisions are strained. There is no expressed organizational principle, transitions from topic to topic are not well marked, and the dialogue alternates freely between critical depictions of the *occupati* (those consumed by meaningless activity) and exaltations of the philosophical life. The following overview thus offers only a descriptive outline of its contents. See also Williams 2003: 19, 21–24; and André 1989: 1747–1749.

The treatise begins with an *exordium* establishing the topic: most humans, both the *inprudens vulgus* and *clari viri*, complain that human life is too short; but it is long enough if put to proper use (1). To demonstrate this point, Seneca illustrates the myriad ways in which we squander life (2f.), providing *exempla* of powerful men unable to retire (4, Augustus; 5, Cicero; 6, Livius Drusus). Chapters 7–9² present a wide-ranging overview of why the *occupati* feel as if life is not long enough: they do not value time itself and therefore they do not realize its loss. At 10.1 Seneca expresses a sort of *propositio*, “the lives of the *occupati* are the shortest of all,” but the structural importance of this has been overstated (Grimal 1959: 5f.). Seneca thereupon presents a technical presentation of the three divisions of time (10.2) and argumentation as to why the *occupati* cannot employ the past (10.3–6) and barely enjoy the present (10.6). Seneca resumes criticism at 11.1 of the *occupati* who have

² See André 1989: 1732 for a renewed argument in favor of Albertini's (1923: 179) transposition of 7.1–7.2 to ch. 12.

wasted their lives (balanced by an exaltation of *otium* at 11.2), then launches a vicious attack on those who live an *otium occupatum* or *desidiosum* (ch. 12–13). Contrary to the idle and meaningless activity of these ignorant types, the philosopher enjoys true *otium* and has a life that is expansive regardless of its biological length—the first sustained construction of the positive aspects of *otium* in the treatise (ch. 14–15; cf. 7.5, 11.2). At ch. 16–17 Seneca returns to satirical illustrations of the *occupati*, before at last calling on his addressee to give up his position as the *praefectus annonae* and return to philosophy (18–20).

TOPICS

The treatise, an exhortation to practice philosophy, is aimed at exposing the meaningless activity that passes for life and providing a suitable alternative to both his addressee and his wider readership. Taking as his point of departure the common complaint that Nature is too stingy when it comes to the length of human life, Seneca offers a defense of Nature (= Stoic *deus/ratio*) by attacking human ignorance: life is not too short, but we make it so because we do not know how to properly use what time we are allotted (1.3). We are misguided on two counts: 1) human life is not to be measured by its duration, and 2) bald activity is not equivalent to living. Seneca offers a corrective to these common misconceptions.

Seneca's critical portrayal of the *occupati* consistently focuses on the antithesis between *vivere* and *esse*, that is “really living” as opposed to “merely existing” (7.3, 7.10). The art of living is a life-long pursuit (*vivere tota vita discendum est*: 7.3), consisting of knowledge (*scientia*), which is more difficult to acquire than any other (7.3; for *scire* cf. 2.1, 7.4, 16.3). Most humans, because they do not practice philosophy, cannot see the truth (*caligo mentis*: 3.1, 13.7) and so do not use their (biological) lives to the fullest. By presenting a catalog of types who merely exist (*esse*), their lives pulled apart by various pointless pursuits, Seneca invites his readers (us) to conduct—from an appropriate distance—an honest audit of their (our) lives (3.2–3, 7.2, 8.1–5). Inescapably, we realize how much of our lives have passed by without real meaning.

Seneca identifies the source of our error: we do not appropriately value time because it is sub-sensory (8.1–5). But time, as one of the four incorporeals, is real, according to Stoic ontology, and Seneca goes so far as to argue that it is the most valuable of all possessions (*re omnium pretiosissima*: 8.1). Although we go to great lengths to protect more tangible possessions, such as land or money, we obligingly allow others to occupy our lives and take time

from us (3.1). The Wise Man, however, understanding the value of time, is most protective of it (*custos eius parcissimus*: 7.5). Challenging the traditional Roman notion of the *vita activa*, Seneca unequivocally states that “only those who free themselves for philosophy are truly *otiosi*” (14.1). This is true *otium* (14.1), not the *desidiosa occupatio* (12.2) or the *iners negotium* (12.4) of those who spend their free time on idle pursuits, still less the indolent life of the man who does not even have the self-awareness to know whether or not he is sitting (12.7 f.). Stoic *otium*—stripped here of all negative implications, as in *De otio*—becomes the arena where one, free from external control and in possession of the self, can engage in meaningful introspection and create an intentional life.³

Really living (*vivere*), then, can only happen when one is in control of time. For the Stoics this means seizing upon the present, because only it is “available.” Seneca urges his readers to “live immediately” (*protinus vive*: 9.2): one cannot put off starting to live because living always involves conscious attention to the present. But unlike the Epicurean *carpe diem*, the Stoic notion of “live immediately” means adapting one’s life as soon as possible to *purposeful* living in harmony with Nature (see Dionigi 1995b). Paradoxically, by embracing the present, one also unlocks both the past and future; all of time is available to the Stoic Wise Man since his consciousness—like that of the Stoic god’s—expands to encompass the universe both spatially and temporally (15.5; see Armisen-Marchetti 1995b). One’s life, and so one’s happiness, therefore depends not on the number of years lived but on the *completeness* of each present moment (reflecting the Stoic idea that time cannot add to one’s happiness, which depends solely on virtue: *SVF* 3.49–67). For Seneca, then, the focus of one’s attention should be not on the whole of life, but only on the present day (7.9, 9.2–3).

At chapter 18, Seneca leaves his theoretical treatment and turns to his addressee, Paulinus, urging him to retire into a more tranquil harbor of life (*otium*) where he may provide more important service (*ad haec sacra et sublimia accedas*: 19.1) than the mundane and all-consuming job as *praefectus annonae*. This epilogue, at one and the same time detached from the rest of the work and yet the crowning testimonial in Seneca’s exposition, downplays the seeming importance of the *annona* in favor of the more important and fulfilling philosophical life, again turning the Roman ideal of the *vita*

³ For *otium* in Roman intellectual thought see André 1962 (37–42 on *Brev.*) and more generally Grilli 1953, André 1966; Griffin 1976: 315–366 treats Seneca and political participation (*De brev.*: 317–321).

activa on its head. This all-consuming post seems to have resonated with imperial Stoics; see Epikt. *diatr.* 1.10, where the *praefectus annonae* is similarly represented as a distracted *occupatus*.

STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Forceful and vibrant, *De brevitate vitae* is aggressive in exposing the myriad reasons why human life appears so short. Rigorous argumentation is minimal, technical language avoided; rather, Seneca's protreptic depends primarily on the brutal but honest exposure of humanity's misguided ways. Satirical illustrations of the *occupati* therefore dominate the work, creating the impression that the excoriation of human ignorance is as important as the exaltation of philosophical reflection. The positive message of the treatise thus works in tandem with these negative portrayals of the *occupati* by creating a stark opposition that serves to highlight the benefits of a philosophical life. Readers are not coaxed but jostled into evaluating their own lives. Seneca's vigorous approach here may reflect the influence of Seneca's teacher Fabianus, whose therapeutic methods relied not on subtle argumentation but on full-on frontal assault (10.1).

Seneca's hard-line strategy aims primarily at overturning, or forcing his readers to rethink, traditional beliefs. Old men with white hair and wrinkles have not lived but merely existed for a long time (7.10). Likewise, Seneca ends the treatise with a stark image: those who squander time planning elaborate funerals should rather be buried at night by "torchlight and candle" like very young children (20.5)—they have not made any progress in "really living." Seneca criticizes the Roman institution of *clientela* (2.1, 2.4 f., 7.7, 12.1, 14.3 f.) but later transforms it into the more positive *clientela* of philosophers (14.5). This aim also plays out on a smaller scale: there is a high incidence of wordplay,⁴ polyptoton,⁵ and correctio⁶ aimed at demolishing conventional notions. We also find *sermocinatio* (3.2 f., 3.5, 7.6, 7.8), impatient questions (esp. ch. 13), and other features of so-called diatribe used to similar ends. Anaphora is deployed here to a degree greater than in any other work, used to

⁴ E.g., 6.4 *vita/vitia*; 7.3 *percepisse/praecipere*; 9.1 *pendet/perdit*; 12.2 *otiosa vita/desidiosa occupatio*; 20.1 *cum videris ... ne invideris ... cum in consummationem dignitatis per mille indignitates erepsissent*.

⁵ E.g., 1.1, 2.4, 3.4, 4.6, 11.1, 17.4, 17.5, 20.5.

⁶ E.g., 1.3 *non exiguum temporis habemus, sed multum perdimus*; 7.10 *non ille diu vixit sed diu fuit*.

accentuate the numerous distractions of the *occupati*⁷ as well as to emphasize the inability of others to take away a philosopher's time.⁸ Conversely, the terse, asyndetic language at 15.5 reflects the Wise Man's control of time;⁹ compare this to the lengthy anaphoric descriptions of the distracted lives of the masses.

SOURCES

Given the non-technical character of *De brevitae vitae* it is difficult to assess the extent to which—if at all—Seneca was reliant on specific philosophical sources. Seneca does not treat the philosophical debate on the three kinds of life as he does in the similarly aimed *De otio* (ch. 7), nor does he appeal to the concept of the two republics found there (ch. 4). Stoicism, though prefiguring the debate, is not outwardly privileged; Seneca mentions only one Stoic philosopher by name, Zeno, and only in passing alongside Pythagoras, Democritus, Aristotle, and Theophrastus. When Seneca does provide technical discussions of time (e.g. 10.2–6, for which see Williams 2003 ad loc.), it is not always possible to attribute specific doctrines to earlier Stoic philosophers, who, our evidence suggests, did not extensively treat time as an ethical issue.

Seneca employs numerous *domestica exempla* from Roman history and pictures from Roman life—ones that would be familiar to his non-Stoic addressee Paulinus. Augustus (ch. 4), Cicero (ch. 5) and Livius Drusus (ch. 6) serve as illustrations of powerful men hoping to retire from their trying public lives. In the first two cases, Seneca draws on an otherwise unknown letter (4.3, 5.2); the last instance is perhaps drawn from a history (*dicitur*: 6.1). In all three cases, the historical material is extensive. Later, he returns with another historical triad, perhaps drawn from handbooks (17.6): Marius, Quintius (Cincinnatus), and Scipio. Only once does he utilize a foreign figure as an *exemplum*, the Persian king Xerxes (17.2).

⁷ 2.1 *alius* 3× (followed by *variatio*: *quosdam ... sunt quos ... multos ... plerosque ... quibusdam*); 2.4 *quam multi* 4× (with *hic* 2×, *ille* 2×); 3.2 *quantum* 7×; 7.7 *quot ille* 5×; 7.8 *quando* 3×; 14.4 *quam multi* 4×.

⁸ 8.5 *nemo/nihil/nusquam* 6×; 11.2 *nihil* 6×; 14.5 *nemo* 3×; 15.1 *nemo/nullius* 5×.

⁹ *transit tempus aliquod, hoc recordatione comprehendit; instat, hoc utitur; venturum est, hoc praecipit.*

CONSOLATIO AD POLYBIUM

Jochen Sauer

DATES AND SOURCES

The *Consolatio ad Polybium* was composed during Seneca's exile on Corsica and is addressed to a freedman who was in charge of the department of petitions at the court of emperor Claudius. The formal occasion for the piece was the death of this man's younger brother. A clear *terminus post quem* is the beginning of Seneca's exile at the end of AD 41, a slightly weaker one is the award of the title *pater patriae* to Claudius in January AD 42 (possibly reflected in 16.4: *parentem publicum*; Grimal 1978a: 227). The *terminus ante quem* is Claudius's Britannic triumph at the beginning of AD 44 (Giancotti 1957: 87, Abel 1967: 163, Grimal 1978a: 227, Kurth 1994: 17), since in 13.2 the hope is expressed to be present at this occasion. It is probable that the work was composed toward the end of this period (Griffin 1976: 396, Grimal 1978a: 277, Abel 1985a: 707), particularly in view of the fact that 6.2 indicates that Polybius, after his appointment by Claudius, had already been in office for some time. Since the emperor was present in Rome (12.3 f., 14.1) a date of composition between the late autumn of AD 43 (return from Britain) and the beginning of the year AD 44 is not implausible (Grimal 1978a: 278, Kurth 1994: 17).

TOPICS AND CONTENT¹

The beginning of the work is lost—probably not much more than the proem (Abel 1985a: 719, Kurth 1994: 25), since the main section gives an impression of completeness. It takes the form of an admonitory address: After the *praecepta* (1–12) there is a transitional passage (13) and then an *exempla* section (14–17); an epilogue forms the conclusion (18). The *praecepta* section proves to be in a ring composition. The rejection of the duty of mourning (4–7) lies at

¹ On the philosophical significance of the consolatory works within Seneca's oeuvre and the character of their thought in general, cf. Setaioli (*infra*, pp. 241–244).

the center, around which the idea of the necessity of transitoriness is laid as a frame (1 and 11 f.). The following *exempla* section is developed as a nine-part, asymmetrical series containing eight positive examples for dealing with personal mourning, reproduced as Claudius's actual words (14.2–16.3), and, in contrast, one negative example portraying Caligula's behavior on the death of his sister (Abel 1985a: 719).

While in the other two *consolationes* Stoic "apatheia" is recommended for the purposes of overcoming mourning (in Marcia's case in a rather mild form, in Helvia's in unmitigated strictness), Seneca here, using the Peripatetic "metriopathy" seems to be following a fundamentally different plan (Abel 1985a: 718; for a different view cf. Studnik 1958: 33 f.): The task is not to cut out the emotions but to master them and control them. Here Seneca distances himself explicitly from the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* (18.5).

Here, even more clearly than in the *Consolatio ad Helviam*, we are dealing with a consolatory piece with the character of a cryptic petition to the emperor to repeal Seneca's banishment (Abel 1985a: 718). The panegyric depiction of Claudius is quite remarkable. It conveys a notion of power in which the *clementia* of the ruler and his care for individual citizens are seen in relation to his unlimited power, in this point an anticipation of the *De clementia*. This account, which may very well reflect the hopes of the author, is quite compatible with the Claudian ideology of power, in which *clementia* and *cura* occupied a central position (statement Hölscher in Döpp 1994: 305).

RESEARCH

The question of authenticity has been solved in favor of Seneca (Isleib 1906, Stephanie 1910, Galdi 1928). Some scholars objected to the positive depiction of Claudius, feeling that it is hardly compatible with the portrait in the *Apocolocyntosis*. The *Ad Polybium* was hereby identified with a work that is mentioned by Cassius Dio (61.10.2 f.). According to him, Seneca sent a work to Messalina and to Claudius's freedmen from Corsica, containing their praises, but later destroyed it due to his feelings of shame about the flattering tone of the piece. Another solution was offered by Momigliano (1932: 75, with n. 119 f.), who considered the panegyric to have a satirical character (further developed by Atkinson 1985: 872–879). However, the explanation that Seneca is here describing Claudius in the mirror of his own expectations (Döpp 1994: 302) seems to carry more conviction, particularly in view of the fact that Claudius had just begun to rule when this work was composed. The panegyric tone is demanded by this genre in praise of the monarch. In

this sense the *consolatio* should be read and interpreted with reference to Claudius, just as Cicero's *Pro Marcello* is understood with reference to Caesar (Grimal 1978a: 99).

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

The double intention of the work leads to the combination of two genres, the literature of consolation and the panegyric. Traditional arguments of consolation (Abel 1967: 70–96, Johann 1968: 85–88, 150–155, Ceccarini 1973: 12–16) can be found side by side with elements of the praise of the monarch, which are placed here to serve Seneca's own interests (Döpp 1994: 295). The praise of the monarch is intensified by contrasting him to Caligula's reign of terror. The picture of the emperor, both in content and style, is quite compatible with Claudius's personal concept of himself; Claudius's speech (14.2, 16.3) reproduces the emperor's favorite stylistic and rhetorical expressions.² Features that will later be used to satirical effect in the *Apocolocyntosis* are here part of the panegyric structure.

² A comparison with Tacitus's account of Claudius's speech in favor of the *ius honorum* for the Gauls makes this very clear. Common features are, for example, the tendency to be pedantically accurate when defining family connections or to give very long series of scholarly *exempla* (Dahlmann 1936: 374 f., Griffin 1990: 482).

CONSOLATIO AD HELVIAM

Jochen Sauer

DATES AND SOURCES

The *Consolatio ad Helviam* is addressed to Seneca's mother Helvia and attempts to provide her with some consolation for his exile. A definite *terminus post quem* is thus determined by the beginning of Seneca's exile at the end of AD 41 and the *terminus ante quem*, the end of his exile at the beginning of AD 49, is equally certain. The remarks in 1.2 and 2.5 suggest that Seneca has already been in exile for some time. Since there is also an allusion to the customary period of mourning of ten months (16.1) and these do not seem to be quite over yet, a probable date of composition would be the spring or summer of AD 42 (Giancotti 1957: 74 f., Abel 1967: 163, Grimal 1978a: 197, Abel 1985a: 707, Kurth 1994: 16 f.); only Griffin (1976: 397 f.) casts doubt upon such a precise dating, seeing in the reference to the ten-month period of mourning only the intention "to exemplify the idea of limit."

Since the literature of consolation from the period before Seneca has not survived well, it is impossible to make reliable statements about possible sources (cf. the remarks on *Ad Marciam*). Seneca remarks that in this work he is trying out something new, since he has found no important work in the literature of consolation where the author himself is the person to be mourned (2.1). This novelty, however, is probably only of limited relevance to the contents and form: traditional elements of the genre are everywhere in evidence.

TOPICS, CONTENT AND RESEARCH¹

The piece possesses a clear structure (Albertini 1923: 64 f., 255 f., Coccia 1959: 150 f.): After stating his personal motivation (1) and giving an account of Destiny's harsh treatment of Helvia (2 f.) Seneca presents the *partitio*: The

¹ On the philosophical significance of the consolatory works within Seneca's oeuvre and the character of their thought in general, cf. Setaioli (*infra*, pp. 241–244).

first task is to make clear that Seneca himself is not to be mourned and that Helvia accordingly need not mourn for his sake (4–13); secondly, that Helvia's own situation does not necessarily demand mourning (14–19). The main section thus adopts a familiar scheme of consolation literature, i.e., the distinction between unselfish and selfish reasons for mourning.

Seneca states his concrete intentions in 4.1: His aim is not just to soften the pain, but to overcome it completely. Accordingly, the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* is present in all its strictness throughout the piece—quite in contrast to the other *consolationes*. The reason for this is not so much an alteration in the author's fundamental principles but rather their adaptation to the addressee: Helvia has great strength of character and has proven so; this enables the idea of invulnerability in the face of Fate to occupy a central place within the argumentation and to appear quite openly as the goal of the inner attitude (Abel 1967: 54 and 1985a: 715).

At the center of Seneca's reflections we have first of all the argument that change of location (and what else, after all, is exile?) occurs everywhere (6f.); the correct spiritual attitude that produces happiness, on the other hand, is, like nature, not dependent on location (8f.). Neither on account of poverty, writes Seneca (10–12), nor on account of the alleged disgrace (13) is exile a miserable lot. Helvia's reason for mourning is not the loss of the protection, which he might have given her (14), but rather the loss of their personal contact. In order to come to terms with mourning, Seneca warmly recommends to Helvia, who is of strong character, the study of philosophy (15–17);² but he also recommends keeping in touch with relatives (18f.), particularly with her sister, who could be a good example. The work concludes with the assurance that he is cheerful and deriving happiness from his studies (20).

In the *Ad Helviam* Seneca explores many different implications and side-implications of the idea of exile. The variety of figurations of exile distinguishes this work from its ancient precedents and as well from Seneca's other consolations (cf. Williams 2006b).

The attempt to bring out the political character of the piece has taken two different forms: one of these sees the work as a cryptic petition, begging the emperor to recall Seneca from exile (Ferrill 1966: 255, Abel 1967 and 1985, André 1995). Seneca's emphasis on his own strict ideal of *integritas* and his

² With the recommendation of the study of philosophy Seneca offers Helvia "the same philosophical safehaven that sustains him on Corsica" (Williams 2006b: 168).

high admiration for conjugal harmony are seen by scholars as connected with the accusation of adultery with Iulia Livilla, which was in fact the reason for his banishment to Corsica. The credibility of Seneca's innocence is increased not so much by the discursive argumentation as by the fact that Seneca calls as witness to his defense his own *fides* and *auctoritas*. Following this intention, Seneca has chosen an addressee of great suitability, his mother being a person to whom he is bound by a special *fides*. Abel more than others (1967: 47 f.) has spoken strongly in favor of this basic tenor of self-defense, while Griffin (1976: 21 f.) makes less of this, pointing out that the motif of *integritas* appears in closely antithetical connection with the motif of *luxuria*, and this latter has nothing to do with the accusation leveled against Seneca; furthermore the concept of *pudicitia* does not really play a particularly dominant role here in comparison with other works.

The other interpretation expects the reader to connect the *exemplum* of Marcellus (9.4–10.1) with Seneca's own fate. Marcellus retreated voluntarily into exile after Caesar's victory at Pharsalos. The parallel is heightened by the fact that Marcellus's situation is portrayed from Brutus's point of view. Grimal (1978a: 97 f.), while underlining the fundamentally apolitical nature of the genre, considers the work to be a clear protest against the "tyranny" of Claudius.

DE CLEMENTIA

Ermanno Malaspina

CONTENT

De clementia is a treatise in two books, of twenty-six and seven chapters, respectively, dedicated to Nero. The only Latin text with Plin. *paneg.* reserved to the imperial ideology, is, with Cic. *rep.*, *leg.*, *off.*, one of the very rare systematic discussions of Roman political thought. Scholars have examined, in addition to the dating, the original structure (two or three books?) and the presumed incompleteness. Today, the analysis of the sources or the genesis of the term *clementia* appears to be more productive field for research (Adam 1970, Borgo 1985, Mortureux 1989: 1658–1664, Carile 1999); little studied are the relationships between *De clementia* and the actual policy of the *Quinquennium Neronis*.¹

The structure of *De clementia* is difficult to recreate, as attested by the different results reached by scholars² despite the presence of a *divisio*, with gaps and corrupted at 1.3.1, whose three *partes*³ probably refer to an original project in three books (like *De ira*), of which we have only the *pars prima* and the beginning of the *secunda*.⁴

Book 1 is constructed on the *honestum—utile* pair, typical of the rhetorical arrangement (*Rhet. Her.* 3.3–7). After the proem with *divisio* (1.1.1–1.3.1),

¹ The political agenda (*consilia et exempla capessendi egregie imperii*) of the speeches at the beginning of Nero's reign (Tac. *ann.* 13.3 f., 10 f.; Suet. *Nero* 10) appears antithetical to *De clementia*, because it is founded on a renewed proposal of the Augustan paradigm of the collaboration between prince and senate, whereas this latter body plays no role in *De clementia* (excellent Griffin 1992: 141, *contra* Grimal 1991b: 119–131, Chaumartin 2005: xlix).

² See Vallette 1930: 688–691, Giancotti 1955: 36–61, Fuhrmann 1963: 491–500, Büchner 1970: 209–212, and Mortureux 1989: 1649–1655.

³ *Nunc in tres partes omnem hanc materiam dividam: prima erit †manu missionis† ***; secunda <ea> quae naturam clementiae habitumque demonstret* (text Malaspina 2005a: 193, 251–256).

⁴ It is impossible to ascertain whether the gap at 2.7.5 derives from a mutilation in the manuscript tradition or whether it was intended by Seneca himself (Malaspina 2005a: 111).

Seneca discusses clemency as *ornamentum*.⁵ In section 8.6–19.9, characterized by careful historical *exempla* (9, 10, 15), clemency appears as *salus*, because it guarantees security and it distinguishes a good king from a tyrant. Lastly, some practical cases on how to punish wrongs (20.1–24.2) are followed by a rhetorical epilogue, which is dominated by the dark-hued portrait of the tyrant (25.1–26.5).

The seven chapters of Book 2 are taken up by a complex terminological disquisition, aimed at establishing the conduct of the *sapiens* and the *differentiae verborum* in the semantic field of *clementia* (as opposed to *crudelitas*, close to *severitas*, and distinguished from *misericordia* and *venia*.)

DATES

In the absence of external clues, from the text one can glean, first, that Nero is already the emperor (*De clementia* is subsequent to 13.10.54); second, that *De clementia* was composed in the early days of the empire, when Nero had raised great hopes among the public.⁶

A parallel between the age of Nero and that of Octavianus at the time of the civil wars (1.9.1)⁷ is, unfortunately, contained within a passage with controversial punctuation. The most ancient reading⁸ places a period after *movit*: hence Seneca would have composed *De clementia* after Nero had turned eighteen (AD 12/15/55–12/14/56) and he would have praised his *innocentia* after Britannicus's poisoning (shortly before AD 2/12/55, Tac. *ann.* 13.15–17), a cynicism that appeared implausible to many (Schimmenti 1997: 53 n. 31). However, the murder of Britannicus, which could fall within those justified by *publica utilitas* (*clem.* 1.12.1), did not formally besmirch Nero's innocence, which he maintained as a pillar of imperial propaganda.⁹

⁵ Clemency is human and it behooves the sovereign, *caput* and *animus* of the empire; a noble and necessary virtue, it obligates one to a "noble servitude" (3.2–8.5).

⁶ The search for more precise chronological clues yields no persuasive results (Schimmenti 2001: 57–68 and Chaumartin 2005: xlv–lii).

⁷ It is intentionally without punctuation marks: *divus Augustus fuit mitis princeps si quis illum a principatu suo aestimare incipiat in communi quidem rei publicae gladium movit cum hoc aetatis esset quod tu nunc es duodevicesimum egressus annum iam pugiones in sinum amicorum absconderat iam insidiis M. Antonii consulis latus petierat iam fuerat collega proscriptionis.*

⁸ From Janus Gruter and Iustus Lipsius to Momigliano 1969: 250 and Griffin 1992: 133–136, 407–411.

⁹ Faider 1929, Lana 1955: 225, Griffin 1992: 134–136.

To this punctuation is preferred, out of stylistic and compositional considerations,¹⁰ the proposal advanced by Calvinus to place a period between *nunc* and *Duodevicensimum*. But this way the passage from “at your present age” to “At eighteen years just completed” can be interpreted both as an explicative reprise¹¹ and as a chronological step on the before-after axis.¹² The dating, therefore fixed in the two-year time frame AD 12/15/54–12/14/56 AD, does not solve the problem of relative chronology with respect to the murder of Britannicus.

TOPICS AND SOURCES

Seneca sets as a substrate of *De clementia* the utterly Roman virtue of *clementia*, first as a Republican, then Augustan, and finally Imperial justification for Rome’s domain; on it, he grafts the Hellenistic themes¹³ that distinguish Book 1. With Book 2, less catchy and more speculative, Seneca ambitiously intends to give full citizenship to the Roman *clementia* of the sovereign in Stoicism, which was hostile to compassionate behavior.

De clementia therefore arises not from encomiastic intents, but from the aspiration to offer a theoretical justification of principality (Griffin 1992: 139, 141), outlining the condition of an individual who, possessing absolute power, exercises it while spontaneously limiting himself by effect of a single virtue, which stands above the other virtues, which are inferior or ancillary to it.

The decision to identify this *extraordinary* virtue in *clementia*¹⁴ derived from Cicero’s discussion of Caesar’s *miser cordia et liberalitas* and from the then-established presence of *clementia* among the *virtutes imperatoriae* (Konstan 2005, Malaspina 2005b, Braund 2009: 27–38). However, it was difficult for Seneca to find grounds for his overestimation of *clementia* in terms of philosophical tradition, since in Greek sources *praôtes*, *epielkeia* and *philanthropia* are not given a predominance over the other virtues.¹⁵ Thus,

¹⁰ Discussion in Malaspina 2005a: 292–301.

¹¹ *Hoc aetatis = Duodevicensimum egressus annum*: “all’età che tu hai ora brandì la spada. (Infatti), uscito dai diciott’anni (= all’età che tu hai ora), già [...]” (Malaspina 2005a: 297), with the traditional dating AD 12/15/55–12/14/56.

¹² “A diciotto anni (= l’età che tu hai ora) brandì la spada. Uscito dai diciott’anni già [...]” (Capocci 1954: 66), with dating AD 12/15/54–12/14/55.

¹³ *Fürstenspiegel*: Delatte 1942, Adam 1970, Hadot 1970, and Bertelli 2002.

¹⁴ *Clementia* establishes “un patto di reciproca tolleranza o benevolenza fra il re ed i sudditi” (Lana 1955: 214), assured by Nero’s singular innate goodness.

¹⁵ This position is reserved for *dikaíosýne* or *sophrosýne* not only in the historical system of

moving from the practical-political to the philosophical-moral context of Book 2, Seneca abandons the prince's (historical and political) uniqueness, making his case fall within the (moral) one of the *sapiens* and diluting the asserted imperial extraordinariness of *clementia* in the more ample concepts of juridical *aequitas* and/or of *humanitas*.¹⁶

This strong discordance between Books 1 and 2 may, however, also betray differences in chronology between the two independent writings: "the result of an incomplete synthesis between an address to Nero and the draft version of a technical treatise analysing the virtue of *clementia*".¹⁷

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

The style is less characterized than that commonly understood to be Senecan, as confirmed by the reduced number of citations in the main discussions of the author's style, lexicon, and grammar (Bourguery 1922a: 206–305, Setaioli 1980–1981, Traina 1987). The syntax, while far from Ciceronian *concinnitas*, is, however, less reduced to *sententiae*; use of diatribe figures (statement and reply with a fictitious interlocutor, rhetorical question, polemic dialectic) is reduced, because the presence of a real interlocutor, like Nero (1.8.1, 2.2.2), reduces the opportunities for a vivacious dialectic confrontation; the fondness for antitheses, anaphors, repetitions and variations, while undeniable, only rarely provides the pages of *De clementia* with the epigrammatic and conceptual verve that is typical of Seneca's other works. In short, it is a more restrained prose, with a language more typical of "predicazione" than of "interiorità,"¹⁸ perhaps because of the debt to the Hellenistic *Fürstenspiegel*, the lack of a final revision, or the alleged

the four cardinal virtues, but even in *Peri basileias* treatises (Ten Veldhuys 1935, Adam 1970, Griffin 1992: 144 n. 3, 166 n. 4, and Braund 2009: 17–19).

¹⁶ 2.7.3: *clementia liberum arbitrium habet, non sub formula, sed ex aequo et bono iudicat, et absolvere illi licet et, quanti vult, taxare litem. Nihil ex his facit tamquam iusto minus fecerit, sed tamquam id quod constituit iustissimum sit*. Fuhrmann 1963: 503, Adam 1970: 39, 49, and Griffin 1992: 159–171 deem the juridical argument to be preeminent here, as a reference to the attenuating circumstance of the crime in view of a superior ideal of *iustitia*, connected with *aequitas*. According to Büchner 1970 and Bellincioni 1984a, to be clement consists instead of subordinating and sacrificing formal compliance with the law to a moral notion, which approaches *humanitas* and the *amor mutuus* feeling of *epist.* 95.52.

¹⁷ "... le résultat d'une synthèse, qui n'a pas été menée jusqu'à son terme, entre un discours à Néron et l'ébauche d'un ouvrage technique, une analyse de la vertu de *clementia*" (Grimal 1991b: 121; see also Vallette 1930).

¹⁸ Traina 1987.

rhetorical nature of Book 1 (see *supra*, p. 178). In any case, *De clementia*, too, is subjected to the rhythmic clause rules.¹⁹

TRANSMISSION

The entire manuscript tradition of *De clementia* derives from Vatican City, Pal. lat. 1547, known as *Nazarianus* (*N*) and written in pre-Carolinian minuscule script in Northern Italy around the year 800. Next to this manuscript, which was passed to Lorsch and then to Heidelberg until 1623, must be placed in terms of antiquity the direct apograph Reg. lat. 1529 or *Reginensis* (*R*), which is slightly more recent and which gave rise in France to the *recentior* tradition.²⁰ *N* and *R* are also the ancestors of *De beneficiis*, a treatise whose circulation was parallel to that of *De clementia* until the invention of the printing press. The sole topic of discussion remains the possibility of a direct filiation of *N*, without passing through *R*, during its stay in Lorsch: this filiation is presupposed by Mazzoli 1978 for *De beneficiis*, but the transmission of *De clementia* probably did not follow the same path (Malaspina 2001b).

RECEPTION

After Seneca, the notion of *clementia* returns to the Augustan limits of the virtue among virtues: Plinius avoids the approach of *De clementia* (*paneg.* 3.4, 35.1, 80.1) and in subsequent panegyrics *clementia* is less frequently found than words like *pietas* and *maiestas*; the term has little weight in coinage and in the juridical vocabulary. Rare are also the allusions, aside from *Octavia* 440–592, in which Seneca, speaking with Nero, puts forth arguments patently deduced from *De clementia*²¹

In the twelfth century *De clementia*, often reduced to an anthology, began circulating again, almost always together with *De beneficiis*: the first traces are found in France (Hildebertus Cenomanensis, maybe Hugo of Flavigny, Alanus de Insulis, Vincentius Bellocensis and Guillelmus de Conchis, see Mazzoli 1978: 92–97). The text was also read during Humanism and the Renaissance,

¹⁹ Hijmans 1991 (65% of clauses are constituted by cr+sp, cr+cr and tr+tr, with the related solutions); Malaspina 2005a: *passim*.

²⁰ The identified *descripti* (over 250) are subsequent to the eleventh century: Buck 1908, Mazzoli 1978, Malaspina 2005a: 11–140.

²¹ Subsequently Flavius Merobaudes (9.13, 9.19 Vollmer), Sidonius Apollinaris (*carm.* 9.230), Martin of Braga: see Préchac 1925: xliii–lxxii, Manuwald 2002.

being worthy in 1532 of the attention of young Calvinus (Battles and Hugo 1969);²² however, *De clementia* never had the publishing success of the epistles or of *De brevitae vitae*. In a place apart is the narration of Cinna in 1.9, which impressed Montaigne (*Essais* 1.23) and was the basis for *Cinna ou la clémence d'Auguste* by Corneille (1640), far more than of *Clemenza di Tito* by Metastasio (1734, see Questa 1998: 191–203). Interest in *De clementia* weakened with the decline of absolutism and the rise of constitutional states; significantly, the concept of Roman *clementia* is invoked by Steven Spielberg's Oskar Schindler when he tries, unsuccessfully, to tame the brutal Amon Göth (*Schindler's List* 1993).²³

²² See also Prinz 1973: 421, Arend 2003a.

²³ "Power is when we have every justification to kill, and we don't. [...] That's what the Emperor said. A man steals something, he's brought in before the Emperor, he throws himself down on the ground. He begs for his life, he knows he's going to die. And the Emperor [...] pardons him [= *clem.* 1.5.4]. This worthless man, he lets him go. [...] That's power, Amon. That is power."

NATURALES QUAESTIONES¹

Gareth D. Williams

Although Seneca embarked on the *Natural Questions* relatively late in life, in the early 60s AD (cf. *senex*: 3 pr. 1), his allusion at 6.4.2 to a youthful work *De motu terrarum*² signals a long-standing interest in natural science. Of the eight surviving books of *Natural Questions*, six are complete, the end of 4a and the beginning of 4b lost. It is conceivable that Seneca planned or completed additional books that would either fill out his treatment of meteorological themes by covering the Milky Way, say, or the sea (both figure in the first three books of Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, which largely set the agenda for later ancient treatments of the subject), or extend into non-meteorological areas such as astronomy; but there is no evidence to deny that the eight surviving books were conceived as a complete and self-contained whole. The title *Naturales quaestiones*,³ first attested in a ninth-century inventory of the library of the Benedictine monastery at Reichenau and subsequently corroborated in the extant manuscript tradition, corresponds to the Greek φυσικά προβλήματα or φυσικά ζητήματα (cf. SVF III p. 205.6–13 for φυσικά ζητήματα attributed to Chrysippus). That the title is unremarkable enough is also indicated by the various parallels for the phrase *naturales quaestiones* that are to be found in Seneca himself and elsewhere (*epist.* 88.24; cf. Cic. *part.* 64, Vitruvius 1.1.7). In contrast to the typical question-and-answer format of the Greek *problēmata* and *zetēmata*, however, with no necessary relation between successive questions, the *Natural Questions* is characterized by a more continuous flow of argument, and also by complex contortions (often through the intrusion of an interlocutory voice) in the substance of Seneca's argument (further, Hine 1981: 28f.). In this respect Seneca's choice of title might be said to raise expectations that are surpassed in the body of the work.

In addressing the same Lucilius who is the recipient of his *De providentia*, *Epistulae morales*, and (probably) the lost *Libri moralis philosophiae* (cf. Vottero 1989: 21–24, 1998: 75), Seneca exploits a continuity of person to suggest

¹ The standard text is now Hine 1996.

² Fr. 5 Haase = T55 Vottero 1998: 166f. (with pp. 31–33).

³ Hine 1981: 24–29 (with important attention to 6.17.3), Vottero 1989: 19f.

a continuation of philosophical(/therapeutic) treatment and purpose. The work is conventionally dated to between 62 and 64AD—a dating that relies on detailed (and disputed) points of chronological interpretation within the text,⁴ but significantly also on Seneca's self-presentation in the *Natural Questions* as a public figure no more, a *senex* who, in the preface to Book 3, belatedly devotes himself to a life of philosophical contemplation. The retirement enacted there may be partly symbolic in its emphasis on *total* philosophical absorption (cf. esp. 3 pr. 2) and in its radical rejection of the more ordinary *negotia* of life, as if challenging his audience with a vision of “true” liberation before he insistently repeats the mantra-like question, “What is important?” (*quid est praecipuum?*) in his interrogation of the unexamined life later in the preface (§§ 11–16). But this philosophical withdrawal also finds a convenient biographical reverberation in Seneca's increasing estrangement from the Neronian court in and after 62AD (cf. Tac. *ann.* 14.53–56, 15.45.3)—a prolific period in which his output, including the *Epistulae morales* and the completion of *De beneficiis*, arguably challenges Cicero's remarkable philosophical industry in 45–44 BC (Hine 2006: 54). Yet why delay until the preface of Book 3 this seemingly programmatic announcement of a new turning in life? An answer that has gained important ground in recent scholarship is that Book 3 was in fact the first in the original ordering of the books of the *Natural Questions*. But if so (and advocates of alternative orderings remain),⁵ how did Book 3 become displaced?

The manuscript tradition presents the books in two main orderings:⁶ 1–4a, 4b–7, known as the *Quantum* order after the first word of 1 pr. 1; and 4b–7, 1–4a, known as the *Grandinem* order after the first word of (what remains of) 4b. On the basis of these divergent orderings, Gercke (1907: v–xlii) divided the MSS into two groups, Φ (*Grandinem*) and Δ (*Quantum*); but he undervalued the independence of a twelfth-century MS, Geneva lat. 77, known as Z, which was tentatively proposed by Vottero (1973: 264–267) as a third branch in addition to Φ and Δ. It has since been convincingly demonstrated by Hine,⁷ however, that despite their different orderings of the books, Φ and Δ derive from a common hyparchetype in a bipartite stemma, with the other hyparchetype represented by Z. The latter has the *Grandinem* ordering: from this agreement

⁴ See Vottero 1989: 20 f., and now Hine 2006: 68–72, with Gauly 2004: 19–28.

⁵ E.g., Gross 1989: 306–320, with a convenient summary of different scholarly proposals on pp. 310 f.

⁶ On book order, see Hine 1981: 2–23, 1983: 376 f., 1996: xxii–xxv; Codoñer 1989: 1784–1795; Vottero 1989: 109–113; Parroni 2002: xlvi–l; Gauly 2004: 53–67.

⁷ Hine 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981: 2 f., 1983: 376 f.

between the two hyparchetypes, the *Grandinem* ordering can be traced back to the common archetype. Internal considerations, including cross-references between books (for which Hine 1981: 6–16), themselves indicate that the original order was 3 (I), 4a (II), 4b (III), 5 (IV), 6 (V), 7 (VI), 1 (VII), 2 (VIII). A plausible explanation (Hine 1981: 17, 1983: 377) for the disruption of that sequence to produce the *Grandinem* ordering is that a codex was broken late in Book 4a—a rupture that resulted in the permanent loss of a section spanning the end of 4a and the beginning of 4b. The two parts were subsequently reconstituted in the wrong order, with Books 3 and 4a following after Book 2 and renumbered as Books IX and X; hence the numeration in the archetype from three to ten, and hence the movement of Book 3 from pole position to penultimate placement.

This reconstruction of the original order allows a loose thematic pattern to be drawn across the different books, the four elements providing its substratum.⁸ Book 3, on the waters of the earth, and 4a, on the Nile, form an initial grouping; then 4b, on clouds, rain, hail, and snow; 5, on winds; and 6, on earthquakes, treat phenomena consisting of or caused by air; and fire loosely connects 7, on comets, 1, on lights in the sky, and 2, on lightning and thunder. Another elemental design can be contrived out of the *Grandinem* ordering, to the effect of Vottero's grouping (1989: 112 f.) of 4b and 5 (air), 6 (earth), 7, 1 and 2 (fire), and 3 and 4a (water). But if we persist with an original order of 3, 4a, 4b, 5, 6, 7, 1, 2, the distribution of the elements also creates a secondary design that is vertical in structure, beginning at water level and then ascending in 4b to the intermediate region of *sublimia* (cf. *inter caelum terrasque*: 2.1.2). True, this upward progress is not always consistent, with the winds of Book 5 anticipating the parallel action of air underground to explain earthquakes in Book 6; and after Seneca rises in Book 7 from “lower” to “higher” (and ultimately celestial) levels of cometary explanation that culminate in his speculation on comets circling in unknown orbits, he descends in Books 1 and 2 to phenomena at the intermediate, atmospheric level. In terms of the broad elemental arrangement across the books, however, from *aqua* to *aer* and then to *ignis*, the work takes on a suggestive symbolic property in distancing us ever further from ground level: as Codoñer (1989: 1800) puts it, “à mesure qu’ils s’élignent de la terre [les éléments] acquièrent une plus grande transcendance.”

⁸ On the arrangement of material, see Waiblinger 1977 (related but contrasted pairs of books in the order 1–7), Hine 1981: 29–34, Codoñer 1989: 1799–803, Parroni 2002: xlix–l, Gauly 2004: 69 f.

An elaboration of this elevating vision loosely relates Seneca's tripartite division of the universe at the opening of Book 2 into lowly *terrena*, intermediate *sublimia*, and lofty *caelestia* to different levels of cognition—the literal, the more abstract, the purely conceptual—a scheme that centers the *Natural Questions* on the atmospheric/meteorological zone of *sublimia*.⁹ Late in Book 1 that spectacular sexual deviant, Hostius Quadra, is pictured relishing the sight of his every bodily exploit in a chamber of mirrors that reflects not just his actions but also his vile inner character (1.16).¹⁰ If Hostius here symbolizes an obsessive form of “terrestrial” vision that stands in contrast to the heightened awareness of the “celestial” philosopher, and if the former's hall of mirrors serves as a claustrophobic antithesis to the latter's free-ranging habitation of the universal whole, the region of *sublimia* represents an intermediary place of contingency and accident, of always changeable conditions and ephemeral phenomena (e.g., lightning, hail, shifting winds, sudden earthquakes, etc.); in that region the naked eye strains to see clearly (cf. “Nothing is more deceiving than our eyesight”: 1.3.9) as we hover with Seneca between observation and conjecture, “reality” and illusion, sight and insight. In the imaginative world of Senecan science, our efforts adequately to grasp and explain these *sublimia* raise us from a level of “terrestrial” cognition to a more elevated plane of inference and speculation, while the permanent movements of the heavenly bodies at the celestial level (comets among them, at least on Seneca's preference for an orbital/planetary interpretation of them in Book 7) symbolize a region of regularity and epistemological certainty—in strong contrast to the provisionality (as if a loose approximation to *dóxa* of a Platonic kind) that characterizes the atmospheric region.¹¹ On this approach, the *Natural Questions* may be concerned not only, or even primarily, with the “true” causes of the phenomena Seneca investigates, but also with the hierarchy of different forms of world perception, which range from the lowly and “terrestrial” to the liberated heights of the “view from above.”¹²

It is *this* idiosyncratic Senecan stamp, this sense of a coherent artistic vision of the physical world, that makes the *Natural Questions* so much more than a useful if largely unoriginal rendering in Latin of theories mostly extrapolated from the Greek scientific tradition. The extent of Seneca's direct

⁹ For this approach, see Williams 2005a: 147.

¹⁰ On Quadra, see Leitão 1998, Bartsch 2000: 82–87, Berno 2002 and 2003: 31–63.

¹¹ Cf. Inwood (2002: 125) on Seneca's concern in the *Natural Questions* with “the epistemic limitations of human nature.”

¹² On this “perennial motif in ancient philosophic writing,” see Rutherford 1989: 155–161, Hadot 1995: 238–250.

acquaintance with many of the authorities on whom he draws is unclear; even in the case of a work such as Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, which he seems to render almost verbatim in places, it remains uncertain if he knew it at first hand or relied instead on an intermediary source such as Posidonius or on doxographical compendia.¹³ Few scholars would now accept, however, especially after the important interventions of Setaioli (1988: 375–452) and Gross (1989), that Seneca depended on a single dominant source such as Posidonius or Asclepiodotus, or on a single compendium source.¹⁴ A versatile reliance on a medley of sources better explains internal contradictions and unevenness across the work, and is arguably more in keeping with the free-ranging doxographical approach that he habitually applies, weighing now this (sequence of) opinion(s), now that, before eventually asserting his own view. Whether contending against a given source who “speaks” *viva voce* (e.g., Diogenes of Apollonia at 4a.2.28 f., Artemidorus of Parium at 7.13.1–3), or in brief or extended debate with interlocutory voices that stubbornly follow their own committed agenda (e.g., 1.5–8, 7.24–27), Seneca brings his doxographical mode to life by injecting personality and drama into the proceedings¹⁵—an idiosyncratic approach enhanced by at least two other distinctive features of Senecan doxography.

First, in certain passages where Seneca may at first appear to be at his most scrupulous in cataloguing earlier theories (e.g., 6.5–26, on earthquakes explained by reference to each of the four elements in turn) or, more broadly, in surveying different types of a given phenomenon (e.g., wind types at 5.7–13), artistic considerations can be seen not just to influence but also to dictate the arrangement of his scientific material. So in Book 5 his coverage of different wind types progresses from pre-dawn breezes to winds of a sturdier but still consistent seasonal character until cloudbursts and whirlwinds finally erupt in the Senecan text, shattering that initial pattern of consistency. The careful ordering of the winds here, rising from calm to wild, offers a suggestive paradigm for “normative” and then transgressive human conduct as pictured later in the book: on this approach the pure science of anemology is subordinate to Seneca's *artistic* orchestration of the winds for a symbolic, and ultimately moral, purpose in Book 5 (further, Williams 2005b). In Book 6 his coverage of received theories of earthquakes

¹³ For more on Seneca's (in)direct(?) use of Aristotle, see Hall 1977: 410–416, Parroni 2002: xxvi.

¹⁴ Concisely on the source problem, Vottero 1989: 24–39, Parroni 2002: xxii–xxvi.

¹⁵ More generally on “Il linguaggio ‘drammatico’ di Seneca scienziato,” Parroni 2002: xxvi–xxxv.

progresses from explanations based on simple visual analogy to a more inferential level of conjecture until, at a purely abstract level of speculation, we are guided solely by the mind's eye. In moving from a visual, literal level of engagement with the world toward a more detached and speculative mode of inquiry, Seneca here suggestively experiments with a variation on his broader purpose in the *Natural Questions* of transporting us from a local to a cosmic, from a "terrestrial" to a more abstract, level of awareness (further, Williams 2006a). From a purely philosophical perspective this different awareness—what might be termed cosmic consciousness—may represent progress in a Senecan/Stoic direction. From a contemporary political angle, however, it arguably offers a form of psychological protection from the vagaries of life under a Nero by cultivating a form of detachment from the here-and-now, or by shifting the primary focus of our identity from immersion in a localized Roman context to identification with the cosmic whole.

Secondly, in collecting the theories of so many enquirers over the ages, ranging from the Presocratics down to his own times and extending from the Greeks to the Egyptians (cf. 3.14.2, 7.3.2 f.) and Chaldaeans (cf. 7.4.1, 28.1) to the Romans (e.g., Caecina, 2.39.1, 49.1, 56.1; Papirius Fabianus, 3.27.4; Varro, 5.16.3), Seneca constructs "a virtual community of scholars" (Hine 2006: 59). In picturing their collective contribution across time to what amounts in Book 7 to a Senecan concept of gradual scientific discovery and intellectual progress (cf. esp. 7.25.3–5, 29.3–30.6), he obliquely inscribes himself into this "virtual academy" (Hine 2006: 58), which may also be tangentially influenced by the familiar Stoic idea of a transcendent community of the wise (Hine 2006: 59). In a post-Ciceronian context, however, this Senecan construct may also be designed to assert a new confidence in the status of Roman philosophy relative to its Greek past. If Cicero took the pioneering step of consolidating a Roman philosophical vocabulary and medium separate from the Greek tradition that was their source, Seneca came of age in a Roman generation for whom philosophy was no longer essentially Greek or necessarily practiced in Greek. He was engaged in "primary philosophy (rather than exegetical or missionary work) in Latin," thinking and writing creatively as "a rare example of first-order *Latin* philosophy" (Inwood 1995: 68, 75; my emphasis). Despite Cicero's efforts in his philosophical dialogues to portray a cultured Roman familiarity with Greek philosophical ideas, that picture was in part idealized (Hine 2006: 58 f.). The majority of sources on which Seneca draws in the *Natural Questions* continues to be Greek, but a strong Roman presence asserts itself by appealing to influential sources such as Varro, by "naturalizing" Greek material and terminology (e.g., "also the Eurus [wind-name] has already been granted citizenship and does not come into our speech as if it were a

foreign word": 5.16.4), and, more generally, by rationalizing the natural world through Roman technological, legal, and political language and metaphor (Hine 2006: 50–53, 54–56, Vottero 1989: 52 f.). In this respect Seneca follows an aggressive agenda as part of a broader movement in the first century AD toward Roman cultural/scientific “ownership” of the world—a tendency that finds an alternative approach in the elder Pliny’s Roman appropriation of nature through serial cataloguing in his *Natural History*.

But whereas Pliny constructs an encyclopedic vision of the world item by item, list by list, the Senecan mindset that brings the world to order in the *Natural Questions* relies on a pre-conceived, “whole” (Stoic) vision of the sympathetic correlation of the universal parts. From this viewpoint, the different phenomena that he explores from one book to the next are based on variations of elemental action, with the elements themselves significantly cast as interchangeable in the introductory Book 3 (cf. *fiunt omnia ex omnibus*: 3.10.1). If the oneness of reality is from the earliest moment, before we can perceive the fragmentation, lost at the ordinary level of experience through the dividing of time, the compartmentalization of different parts of existence (e.g., work, leisure; childhood, adolescence, adulthood), the partitioning of history, the habitual classifications that systematically categorize life, on offer in the *Natural Questions* is an imaginative vision of the original oneness—a vision that is acted out in the seamless incorporation into the work of different but (in Seneca) related meteorological phenomena, in the combination of scientific exegesis and “literary” elaboration (extending to the easy intermingling of prosaic exposition and poetic quotation), and, perhaps above all, in the fusion of ethics and physics. A central controversy in modern assessments of the *Natural Questions* is how, if at all, to reconcile Seneca’s main scientific agenda with the moralizing emphasis imported in prefaces (Books 1, 3, 4a), epilogues (cf. 1.17, 2.59, 4b.13, 5.18, 6.32, 7.31 f.), and seeming digressions within the text (cf. 1.16, 3.17 f., 5.15).¹⁶ If few critics would now endorse a polarizing approach to the problem, to the effect that the scientific or the moralizing emphasis is subordinate to and fully detachable from the other, more sympathetic responses that reconcile the two planes in a unified work nevertheless differ significantly in emphasis and strategy. To take but two recent examples, Gauly (2004: 73–85) enterprisingly applies the Bakhtinian notion of “Dialogizität” to set the (Roman) moralizing sections in productive dialogue with the main (Greek) doxographical content; while

¹⁶ Conveniently on the history of the problem, Codoñer 1989: 1803–1808, Scott 1999, esp. 55–57.

Berno (2003) sharply analyzes the detailed network of intratextual linkages, operative within a larger scheme of oppositional pairings in the different books (e.g., visual reality and illusion in 1, *natura/luxuria* [and more] in 4b), that integrate the digressions within their respective contexts or whole books.

While differences of method and outlook may separate interpretations that nevertheless share this integrating approach, the fact remains that the ethical and physical branches of philosophy are for Seneca closely intertwined: the study of nature elevates us above the vicious impurities (*sordida*) of life, fortifying the soul from corruption in its bodily prison (cf. 1 pr. 11, 3 pr. 18). Hence the sympathetic correlation drawn between contemplation of nature and the self at, e.g., *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).20.1 (Seneca on the benefits of his Corsican exile): “[...] my soul, free of all preoccupation, [...] now amuses itself with lighter studies, and, pressing eagerly after truth, now rises to the contemplation of its own nature and the nature of the universe (*suam universique naturam*).” More generally, given that to the Stoic imagination the three parts of Hellenistic philosophy, physics, ethics, and logic, are mutually informing and involving (cf. Hadot 1998: 77–79), the *Natural Questions* would in a way be incomplete *without* a significant moralizing emphasis. The study of physics inevitably implicates ethics, not least because the rational functioning of the physical world that Seneca charts in the *Natural Questions* establishes a paradigm of normative behavior that is overthrown by the human excesses that he features in his moral excursions. As in the case of Senecan tragedy (albeit there with different dramatic expression), the order of nature is here permanently in tension with disorderly human nature; the scientific portions of the *Natural Questions* themselves construct a vision of rational nature that has significant implications for *moral* interpretation of her as always benign, even when humankind is destroyed by a disaster as indiscriminate and total as the cataclysm that overwhelms the end of Book 3 (§§ 27–30).¹⁷

Relatively few traces of the *Natural Questions* are found in later Classical antiquity.¹⁸ In his *De bello civili* Lucan, Seneca’s nephew, shows a direct familiarity with the work (Stok 2000: 350 and n. 6); and there are clear verbal overlaps with the pseudo-Virgilian *Aetna*, but the exact chronological relationship between the two remains uncertain.¹⁹ It is possible that the

¹⁷ Cf. Long 1985: 25 for the Stoic world conflagration as part of “a rational and beneficent plan for the good of the whole” (my emphasis).

¹⁸ In general on the work’s *sopravvivenza*, see Waiblinger 1977: 1–8, Vottero 1989: 54–69, Stok 2000, Parroni 2002: xxxv–xl, Trovato 2005.

¹⁹ On the whole question, see De Vivo 1989 (adjudging the *Aetna* the later work).

elder Pliny drew on the *Natural Questions* in his *Natural History*, especially in Book 2, on cosmology (Vottero 1989: 56), but he makes no direct mention of the work. It is not until the late fourth century that fresh echoes are heard in Ammianus Marcellinus, albeit possibly via an intermediary (Stok 2000: 351; Parroni 2002: xxxvi–xxxvii). Apart from traces in the *Etymologies* of Isidore (Ross 1974: 130), the *Natural Questions* disappears from view in the Latin West until the twelfth century, while in the Greek East it resurfaces briefly in the sixth century, in the fourth book of John the Lydian's *Peri menôn/On months*. Locating the Nile's annual flood in July, John offers a doxographical survey of its causation that is derived, very possibly via an intermediary, from Seneca's treatment of the theme in *nat.* 4a (Vottero 1989: 59 f., Parroni 2002: xxxvii). This survey is of special interest because of its coverage of sources (4.107, pp. 146.3–147.6 Wünsch) on which Seneca apparently drew in the portion of 4a now lost to us.

While manuscripts can be traced to Reichenau and elsewhere in the ninth century, there is evidence to locate the rediscovery of the *Natural Questions* in northern France by the early twelfth century (Hine 1983: 377). The first writer known to draw upon it is William of Conches (ca. 1090–1154) in his *Philosophia mundi* and *Dragmaticon*, and other allusions are found in the twelfth century before its wider diffusion in northern Europe in the thirteenth century, when it was used by such savants as Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1175–1253), Vincent of Beauvais (ca. 1190–1264), Roger Bacon (ca. 1214–1294), and Albertus Magnus (between 1193 and 1206–1280).²⁰ By the end of the thirteenth century the *Natural Questions* reached Italy, where copies of it quickly proliferated. With the rise of Renaissance humanism in the fourteenth century, however, Seneca's moral writings drew greater scholarly interest than the *Natural Questions*; it is significant that the *editio princeps* of his philosophical works (Naples 1475) predates by fifteen years that of the *Natural Questions* in the 1490 Venice edition of his *opera*. Already late in the twelfth century the diffusion in the West of Aristotle's *Meteorologica* in a Latin version rendered from an Arabic translation by Gerard of Cremona (Haskins 1924: 14 f., Lindberg 1978: 65 f.) provided a new foundation for meteorological study. Despite the proliferation of editions in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, this Aristotelian presence, and the advances made in technical instruments and observation, contributed to the gradual marginalization of what, from a scientific standpoint, came to be viewed as “una raccolta di ‘curiosità’” (Vottero 1989: 64). This reputation has contributed to a relative

²⁰ On these and other influential figures, see Nothdurft 1963: 161–181.

neglect in modern scholarship, albeit with a welcome resurgence in the later twentieth century. If in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries scholarship on the *Natural Questions* was centered primarily on matters of text, the ordering of the books, and source identification (cf. Waiblinger 1977: 5), recent scholarship continues to grapple with the problem of reconciling its scientific and moralizing portions. Or to state the position differently: just how to define and articulate the “true” nature and meaning of Senecan (literary) science remains an important (even the main) object of debate in contemporary scholarship.

EPISTULAE MORALES*

Aldo Setaioli

The *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, “the highest and most mature” of Seneca’s works,¹ were composed near the end of his life. One of the earliest letters, which makes it clear that he is writing after his retreat from public life,² must probably be dated in the spring of AD 62.³ References to historical events that can be securely dated are extremely rare; only one letter can be safely connected with a precise date, namely *epist.* 91, which mentions the fire of Lugdunum (Lyon), which took place near the end of the summer of 64.⁴ For the rest, we must be content with a few scattered hints at the month or the season: *epist.* 18 is written in December, during the *Saturnalia*;⁵ *epist.* 23 during a cold spring following upon a mild winter;⁶ *epist.* 67 toward the end of a similarly cold spring;⁷ *epist.* 86 toward the end of June.⁸ Consequently, if the spring mentioned in *epist.* 23 is the same as that in *epist.* 67, it must be the spring of AD 64, and the December of *epist.* 18 must be placed in AD 63. This is the so-called “short” chronology. Conversely, if epistles 23 and 67 refer to the two successive springs of 63 and 64, epistle 18 obviously refers to December of AD 62—the so-called “long” chronology. Although several scholars have attempted calculations based on more or less plausible rhythms of exchange of correspondence between Seneca and Lucilius,⁹ there is too much we do not know to do so in any credible way. However, despite several authoritative

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¹ Abel 1985a: 745: “dasjenige Werk, in dem er sein Reifstes und Höchstes gab, die ‘*Epistulae morales*.’”

² *Epist.* 8.1: *in hoc me recondidi et fores clusi, ut prodesse plurimis possem [...]* 2: *secessi non tantum ab hominibus, sed a rebus, et in primis a meis rebus.*

³ Tac. *ann.* 14.52–56.

⁴ Cf. Tac. *ann.* 16.13.3.

⁵ *Epist.* 18.1: *December est mensis [...]* *Saturnalia.*

⁶ *Epist.* 23.1: *hiemps [...]* *et remissa fuit et brevis, [...]* *malignum ver [...], praeposterum frigus.*

⁷ *Epist.* 67.1: *ver aperire se coepit, sed iam inclinatum in aestatem, quo tempore calere debebat, intepuit nec adhuc illi fides est; saepe enim in hiemem revolvitur.*

⁸ *Epist.* 86.16: *Iunius mensis est quo tibi scribo, iam proclivis in Iulium.*

⁹ Binder 1905 offers such calculations in support of the “short” chronology; more persuasively Grimal 1991b: 219–233, 443–456 uses them to support the “long” chronology. But, as Mazzoli (1989b: 1853) rightly remarks, “i ritmi elaborati da Grimal hanno il merito di essere realizzabili, piuttosto che reali.”

supporters of the “short” chronology,¹⁰ it is difficult to imagine that during just a part of the spring of AD 64 Seneca had the time to send at least¹¹ 45 letters to Lucilius; therefore, epistles 23 and 67 must refer to two different springs, although both cooler than usual: those of 63 and 64. The “long” chronology appears to be all but necessary¹² to account for any chronological frame in which the letters may plausibly fit.¹³

According to Grimal’s formulation, the *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* are a sort of “diary”¹⁴ that Seneca kept in the latter part of his life. We shall see how this might be the case after a brief survey of the collection’s content.

First of all, it must be said that the *Epistulae* are meant as spiritual direction and as a guide to ethical education (including self-education) and moral progress, engaging both the addressee and the writer himself. This involves an initial stage that aims to win over the addressee to Seneca’s educational program, followed by a further stage consisting of the actual teaching of the moral tenets of Stoicism—although the previous stage (the *admonitio*) will never be completely superseded. As we shall see, these two stages entail different linguistic and stylistic approaches, and are roughly reflected in the two parts of the collection, the second (*epist.* 89–124) turning increasingly to theoretical questions rather than moral paraenesis.

The general theme of the letters is that virtue—or moral good—is the only good, and vice the only evil; what is commonly regarded as “good” and “evil” is in reality “indifferent” (*indifferens, adiaphoron*). So, for example, death is no evil; in fact, suicide is the guarantee of the wise man’s freedom. All must engage in the attainment of “right reason” (*recta ratio, orthos logos*); this entails the free and willing acceptance of the cosmic order: fate is perfectly equivalent to providence. If we are so disposed, nothing can prevent us from attaining virtue. Human will is crucial in this regard.¹⁵

¹⁰ These include such scholars as Abel, Griffin, and others. See the clear review in Mazzoli 1989b: 1851f.

¹¹ We must in fact admit the (likely) possibility that not all the letters written by Seneca to Lucilius found their way into the collection: cf. Grimal 1991b: 443.

¹² Grimal 1991b: 222 n. 553 speaks of “la quasi-nécessité de la chronologie longue”; cf. Cugusi 1983: 197, Mazzoli 1989b: 1853.

¹³ As I say this I am, of course, assuming that the letters do record a real correspondence between Seneca and Lucilius. See below.

¹⁴ Grimal 1991b: 219: “les *Lettres à Lucilius* nous donnent une sorte de journal du philosophe.” According to Schönegg 1999, Seneca is an artist portraying himself in the *Epistulae*; but this interpretation is based on symbolisms arbitrarily “discovered” in the letters. Schönegg takes it for granted that the correspondence is fictional.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Voelke 1973: 161f., Abel 1985a: 749, Mazzoli 1989b: 1874f. According to Inwood (2005a: 132–156), Seneca failed to discover will as a separate moral faculty.

One theme, which is particularly developed in the letters, is Seneca's reflection on time, whose fleeting transience must be conquered by appropriating it as an ideal present, snatched from contingency. When one has reached moral perfection, one moment does not differ from eternity.¹⁶ Space does not permit us to go into further detail;¹⁷ we shall only remark that the theme is posed from the very first epistle, and point out that there is a further dimension of Senecan time that has not received the attention it deserves: the subjective conception of memory, which might remind one of Proust.¹⁸

The first problem the student of the *Epistulae* must address is whether the collection reflects a real correspondence between Seneca and Lucilius or whether the epistolary form is just a literary fiction. Both positions have been defended by authoritative scholars,¹⁹ but the burden of proof rests of course with those who deny that Seneca's letters are what they purport to be.

The letters are clearly arranged in chronological order, as even those who consider them to be fictional must admit,²⁰ and several contain lively descriptions of details of daily life. Taking both these characteristics as a literary device aimed at giving "a pleasing depth to the illusion of epistolarity"²¹ and,

¹⁶ E.g., *epist.* 93.8: *quaeris quod sit amplissimum vitae spatium? usque ad sapientiam vivere; qui ad illam pervenit attingit non longissimum finem, sed maximum*; 73.13: *Iuppiter quo antecedit virum bonum? diutius bonus est: sapiens nihilo se minoris existimat quod virtutes eius spatio brevior cludentur*. Cf. also *epist.* 53.11, *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).1.5. See Setaioli 1988: 94–96.

¹⁷ We may refer to the bibliography collected in Viparelli 2000: 183–188, to which add Lévy 2003.

¹⁸ I am thinking especially of *epist.* 49.1–4. Cf. Viparelli 2000: 41, 49, 54–59.

¹⁹ See the clear review offered by Mazzoli 1989b: 1846–1850. Supporters of the fictional nature of the correspondence (first asserted by Lipsius) include Hilgenfeld, Bourgerly, Cancik, Maurach, Griffin, and Abel. After 1989, this position was defended by Graver (1996: 10–32), who however must conclude (p. 29) that "no *fictive* correspondence in prose had been attempted on anything like the scale of the *Epistulae Morales*"—which hardly supports her thesis. Seneca's letters are decidedly a *novum*, but in a different sense. See below. Cf. also Hachmann 1996: 393. For Schönegg 1999, see *supra* (n. 14). The correspondence is real for Schultess, Binder, Albertini, Delatte, Lana, Cugusi, and Mazzoli himself.

²⁰ E.g., Bourgerly 1911: 41. In addition to the usual arguments (see *supra*, on *epist.* 18, 23, 67, and 86), I would like to point out that the chronological order is confirmed by the internal references found in the collection. *Ep.* 20.13 quotes *epist.* 18.5; *epist.* 33.1 calls *epist.* 1–29: *priores epistulae*; *epist.* 75.9 quotes *epist.* 71.4; *epist.* 76.20 quotes *epist.* 74.21; *epist.* 8.1 harks back to *epist.* 7.1, as well as *epist.* 57.1 to *epist.* 53. In some cases, the reference is to a later letter (*epist.* 45.13 announces *epist.* 48 and 49. Cf. also *epist.* 94.52 ~ *epist.* 95.1 and *epist.* 36.11 ~ 71.12f.). But this hardly implies a rigorous preconceived plan; promises are not always fulfilled: a discussion on the problem of free will is promised (*nat.* 2.38.3, *epist.* 16.6), but never appears in Seneca's writings.

²¹ See Graver 1996: 16; but it is a common line of argument with the supporters of fictionality; cf., e.g., Bourgerly 1911: 46, 52. The figure of the addressee, Lucilius, has been interpreted as no more than a "fictional interlocutor" by the supporters of fictionality, whereas

in the final analysis, at deceiving the reader, clearly amounts to begging the question. The common point of the line of argument of many supporters of the fictionality of the letters is that they tend to take for granted the very point to be demonstrated.²²

What does appear from the collection is that the *Epistulae* were really written to Lucilius but were also meant as “open letters” to be published and made available to a wider public,²³ including posterity—which Seneca considered his ultimate addressee.²⁴ If we deny their authenticity, we give up the opportunity to understand their specific literary and philosophical import, which we shall now try to elucidate.

As Margaret Graver rightly remarks,²⁵ an important reason for resorting to the epistolary form was “its potential for creating a strong authorial presence.”²⁶ But an equally important ground was that it implied a constant mutual relationship with an addressee and therefore it especially suited Seneca’s peculiar way of thinking and expressing his thought, constantly fluctuating between the inner self and the outside world.²⁷ As aptly remarked by Foucault,²⁸ whereas in his letters Cicero “recounts himself” as acting or deliberating in the outside world, what Seneca describes to Lucilius is his own relationship to himself—and not merely through his philosophical meditations, but also through the ordinary everyday events that prompt them. We shall soon see the importance of these “frame effects.”²⁹

the opposite view has been defended by some of their opponents. Cf. Mazzoli 1989b: 1853–1855. In my opinion, no conclusion can be drawn from this argument either way: apart from a few biographical facts, the only Lucilius we know is the portrait sketched by Seneca—he is his “creation” (*meum opus es: epist.* 34.1) in more ways than one.

²² Abel (1985a: 745) unambiguously states that the fictionality of the letters is not generally recognized only because Seneca was a clever forger (“wenn die Wahrheit [!] sich so schwer hat durchsetzen können, dann darf man darin vornehmlich einen Triumph der Senecanischen Darstellungsweise erblicken, der es gelungen ist, dem vorgetäuschten Schein das Aussehen echten Seins zu geben”). See also Abel 1981a. Bourguery (1911: 51) goes as far as to state that the *real* letters of Epicurus prompted Seneca to write his *fictive* ones to Lucilius.

²³ Cf., e.g., Cugusi 1983: 200 f.

²⁴ *Epist.* 8.2, 21.5, 22.2, 64.7; cf. 79.17. Interestingly, Lana (1991a: 270 f.) points out that Seneca’s interest in posterity appears only after his retirement.

²⁵ Graver 1996: 30.

²⁶ The letter is in fact an “image of one’s own soul.” Cf. Demetr. *eloc.* 227 and Graver 1996: 30.

²⁷ Cf. the felicitous formulation of Traina 1974: 41: “linguaggio dell’interiorità [...] linguaggio della predicazione.”

²⁸ Foucault 1983: 16–18.

²⁹ According to the felicitous definition of Mazzoli 1991. As rightly observed by Rosati 1981: 9, the connection of the letter with everyday reality makes it an ideal genre for the daily practice of philosophy.

But the letter has other advantages, too. Seneca was obviously familiar with Artemon's definition of the letter as a "halved dialogue" reported by Demetrius:³⁰ if living together is best,³¹ the letter is the next best thing.³² This was a traditional view; but Seneca proceeds beyond it: communication by letter is actually better than being physically together, in as much as it is not impaired by occupations and the neglect induced by the very nearness and availability of the friend.³³ And, most of all, the very impossibility of offering ready advice makes the letter the ideal vehicle for imparting universal moral instruction valid for everyone, including posterity, as well as for the individual addressee.³⁴

This brings us to Seneca's conception of the letter (*his* letter) and its place in the epistolary writing of antiquity. A number of predecessors and possible models for Seneca's letters have been proposed,³⁵ but only four have been considered to be most relevant: the letters of Plato and Epicurus on the Greek side, those of Cicero and Horace in Latin. Contacts with Plato and Horace have been emphasized especially by supporters of the fictionality of the letters;³⁶ but Seneca never mentions either one in this connection, while making it clear that the models he has in mind are the letters of Epicurus and those of Cicero to Atticus.³⁷

As far as the latter are concerned, Seneca's conception of *his own* letters makes it clear that what he meant to achieve was something quite different from Cicero's letters to Atticus.³⁸ It would be hasty, however, to view these merely as Seneca's "anti-model."³⁹ We should not forget that a key element in Seneca's collection is taken from Cicero, namely the single addressee,⁴⁰

³⁰ Demetr. *eloc.* 223.

³¹ *Epist.* 6.5 f.

³² *Epist.* 67.2: *tecum esse mihi videor [...]* *quasi conloquar tecum.* Cf. 75.1. Thraede 1970: 65 f.

³³ *Epist.* 55.8–11.

³⁴ *Epist.* 22.1 f.; cf. 64.7.

³⁵ Cf., e.g., Graver 1996: 27–29.

³⁶ E.g., Maurach 1970: 183 f., 188–190 for Plato; Cancik 1967: 54–58, Maurach 1970: 196 f., and Graver 1996: 12 for Horace.

³⁷ *Epist.* 21.3–5.

³⁸ Even before we find this explicitly stated by Seneca (*epist.* 118.1 f.).

³⁹ Cf. the remarks by Thraede 1970: 65–88.

⁴⁰ Seneca specifically mentions Cicero's letters to Atticus, not the *ad familiares*, nor any other letters of his, for that matter. As Cugusi (1983: 200) remarks, there were other published letters of Seneca's to another addressee (cf. Mart. 7.45.3 f.)—which proves that a collection with a single addressee follows a definite literary pattern. According to Cugusi (1983: 203), the planning of the letters as replies to Lucilius and the intimate tone of the correspondence are also derived from Cicero.

whereas Epicurus's letters have several, as Seneca well knew.⁴¹ We should also bear in mind Seneca's attitude of *aemulatio* toward Cicero, which can be traced in his writings from very early on, at both the literary and philosophical level.⁴² True, Cicero's letters to Atticus were not meant for publication like Seneca's, but under the empire they were obviously considered a literary classic,⁴³ to the point that Fronto could write: *epistulis Ciceronis nihil est perfectius*.⁴⁴ When Seneca states that he will be able to grant immortality to Lucilius just as Cicero did with Atticus and Epicurus with Idomeneus,⁴⁵ and later adds that his letters will contain useful moral teachings rather than idle gossip,⁴⁶ his challenge to Cicero involves both literary glory (i.e., stylistic form) and content—whose philosophic worth will grant him primacy in the Latin epistolary genre.

As for Epicurus, we can be sure that Seneca knew at least some of his letters,⁴⁷ although he drew many of his quotations from anthologies. They were a suitable model for letters of ethical instruction, especially in view of Epicurus's attitude to his pupils: the same atmosphere of familiarity is indeed found in the letters to Lucilius—although Seneca never presents himself as an accomplished and infallible master, but always as a seeker of truth trying to progress toward virtue just like his pupil.

Though Seneca, by referring both to Cicero and Epicurus, makes it clear that he intends his work to belong in the epistolary genre, regardless of content and approach, it is equally clear that he is quite consciously attempting something new in the literary panorama.⁴⁸ This is made apparent by the very title of the collection, which is at least as old as Gellius,⁴⁹ and possibly goes back to Seneca himself: *Epistulae morales*. According to

⁴¹ Cf. Setaioli 1988: 171–182.

⁴² Cf. Setaioli 2003: 61–75.

⁴³ Cicero's letters to Atticus had surely been published for a long time when Seneca wrote his to Lucilius. Cf. Setaioli 1976, refuting contrary views. There are reliable signs of Seneca's awareness of the letters to Atticus from the time of his exile (*dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*] 1.2). Cf. *infra*, p. 241 n. 27, and Setaioli 2003: 63 f.

⁴⁴ Fronto, II, p. 158 (Haines). *Epist.* 21.4 proves that Seneca viewed Cicero's letters to Atticus as literature. Cf. Thraede 1970: 67.

⁴⁵ *Epist.* 21.3–5.

⁴⁶ *Epist.* 118.1f.

⁴⁷ Cf. Setaioli 1988: 171–182.

⁴⁸ Cf. von Albrecht 2004: 2. Rosati (1981: 3) rightly emphasizes Seneca's play with the usual formulas of greeting to stress the novelty of his letter writing (e.g., *epist.* 15.1); cf. Mazzoli 1991: 74 n. 15, Spina 1999: 18, 22–28, who also points out “metaliterary” beginnings and endings in several letters.

⁴⁹ Gell. 12.2.3.

Lana, it is the first literary collection of letters in Latin prose,⁵⁰ meant to be published and made homogeneous by the common purpose to impart useful ethical teaching.⁵¹ But whereas Lana sees little difference between Seneca's letters (at least the longest ones)⁵² and his treatises, Mazzoli rightly points out that opposing Seneca's "epistles" to the lively "letters" of Cicero or anybody writing his friends about the events of his life fails to do justice to Seneca: a so-called "epistle" can be just as real and lively as a "letter."⁵³ Mazzoli finds the specific character of Seneca's letters in the often outwardly irrelevant details of daily life, which prompt the writer's ethical reflection in several cases.⁵⁴ Through a shrewd analysis of several such "frames," he points out the links connecting the details of everyday life with the philosophical developments making up the main part of each letter—a feature distinguishing Seneca's *Epistulae* from his treatises. Actually, as Mazzoli remarks, the tight unity of "frame" and philosophical reflection is explicitly theorized by Seneca.⁵⁵

Often these factual "frames" are marked by humor, especially self-irony. This aspect has been well illustrated by Armisen-Marchetti.⁵⁶ The humorous anecdotes or self-portraits reveal to Seneca as well as to the reader his miserable physical and/or spiritual conditions, of which he had previously not been fully aware, and help diminish the distance between master and

⁵⁰ In verse there are, of course, Horace's *Epistulae*. Lana (1991a) devotes several pages (258–268) to Seneca's letters in relation to other epistolary collections; the other standard treatment is Cugusi 1983: 196–206.

⁵¹ Lana 1991a: 268, 271.

⁵² Seneca clearly distinguishes between a letter and a book (*epist.* 45.13, 85.1, 89.17) and often hints at excessive length (e.g., *epist.* 30.18, 47.21, 51.13, 52.15, 86.21, 108.39). Only in one case (*epist.* 108.39) do we find such a remark in the second part of the collection, where the average length of the letters increases (though he does call *epist.* 95 an *ingens epistula*: 95.3). The length of the letters ranges from 2 paragraphs (*epist.* 38) to 74 (*epist.* 94). Cf. Lana 1991a: 292–295 (*epist.* 62 has 149 words and 17 lines; *epist.* 94 has 4,164 words and 503 lines). However, in spite of the "objective" indication of *epist.* 45.13 (*non debet sinistram manum legentis implere*), the length of the letter is largely a matter of subjective judgment; there are short letters, like *epist.* 38, 62, and 122, and immensely long ones, like *epist.* 94 and 95.

⁵³ Mazzoli 1989b: 185f., polemicizing against Cancik and Thraede and quoting *epist.* 40.1.

⁵⁴ Mazzoli (1991: 73–75) classifies all the letters that have come down to us in relation to the presence and type of such a "frame." At least 25 contain what Foucault terms "écriture de soi." A slightly revised list is given by Spina 1999: 21 f.

⁵⁵ *Epist.* 55.3: *ex consuetudine tamen mea circumspicere coepi an aliquid illic invenirem quod mihi posset bono esse*. Cf. Mazzoli 1991: 82.

⁵⁶ Armisen-Marchetti 2004. Earlier, Grant (2000) had especially stressed the theatrical and comic elements found in these Senecan descriptions.

pupil,⁵⁷ although the former, as already mentioned, never pretends to have reached or even approached moral perfection.

The letter is by nature “unsystematic” and allows the treatment of single problems detached from a wider doctrinal context,⁵⁸ but not all of Seneca’s letters are limited to a single theme.⁵⁹ However, we must leave aside the investigation of the structural problems posed by the individual letters and restrict ourselves to the collection as a whole.

What should never be forgotten is that we do not possess the complete collection. In addition to the twenty books that have come down to us⁶⁰ at least two more existed, as testified by Gellius, who quotes from Book XXII.⁶¹ We must refer to Mazzoli’s clear overview of the several divisions and articulations that have been proposed.⁶² All scholars agree that the first three books (*epist.* 1–29) form a compact unit marked as such by Seneca himself,⁶³ and that in the second part of the collection (*epist.* 89–124) the average length of the letters increases, although shorter ones are interspersed here and there. Hildegard Cancik⁶⁴ is right when she stresses the interaction of structural references, which form a close-knit network linking the letters to one another and unifying the collection. This unity, however, is not the result of a compositional plan previously elaborated and later developed in a collection of fictional letters; rather, it is the spiritual direction common to all the epistles that causes the basic ideas connected with it to appear and reappear when needed to foster the accomplishment of the spiritual director’s task. This is what really confers unity on the collection. As Mazzoli

⁵⁷ Armisen-Marchetti (2004: 322) remarks that this is probably not a strategy consciously pursued by Seneca.

⁵⁸ Seneca himself opposes the moral letter to his organic treatment of ethics (*themoralis philosophiae libri*): cf. *epist.* 106.1f., 108.1. In *epist.* 81.3 he offers a more in-depth treatment of a problem already discussed in the *De beneficiis*. Cf. Rosati 1981: 11f.

⁵⁹ Abel 1985a: 750 distinguishes between “monothematic” and “polythematic” epistles.

⁶⁰ The letters are transmitted by a double tradition. A first group includes *epist.* 1–88 (Books I–XIII), a second *epist.* 89–124 (Books XIV–XX). These separate traditions go back at least to late antiquity. The first group is further divided (*epist.* 1–52: Books I–V, and 53–88: Books VI–XIII). The divisions between Books XI–XIII and XVII–XVIII are not marked in the tradition. Book XXII may have been part of a separate group that included posthumous letters. Cf. Reynolds 1965a. More recently, Jeannine Fohlen has studied the tradition of the *Epistulae*. We shall only mention Fohlen 2000. For more details, see Marshall, *supra*, p. 43.

⁶¹ Gell. 12.2.2–13.

⁶² Mazzoli 1989b: 1860–1863. Lana (1991a: 283f.) denies the existence of a structural plan in the collection, with the exception of the first three books.

⁶³ *Epist.* 29.10: *ultimam pensionem*; 33.1: *his quoque sicut prioribus*. As Abel (1985a: 751) rightly remarks, the first passage seems to indicate that the book division goes back to Seneca himself.

⁶⁴ Cancik 1967: 6.

rightly remarks,⁶⁵ it is a “work in progress”—at the ethical as well as at the literary level.

The ethical object of the *Epistulae ad Lucilium* is matched by Seneca's peculiar linguistic and stylistic resources. The scope of this article does not allow us to dwell on his stylistic praxis,⁶⁶ but we should at least mention Seneca's theoretic discussion of the style appropriate to philosophical works like his own, and note that his theory finds practical application in his own writings, as Michael von Albrecht has rightly remarked.⁶⁷ According to Seneca, the philosopher must be able to master both a style that appeals to the emotions, in order to convince the pupil to undertake his moral reformation, and a plainer one, to be used later for actual instruction. In his discussion of style, Seneca reaches some surprisingly “modern” conclusions: every writer has his own personal style and establishes his own individual rules, and his relationship to the models is no passive process of reproducing their style, but rather amounts to a cultural formation pre-eminently aiming to elaborate the contents by bringing one's own, original contribution. In Seneca we witness the fruitful encounter of the innovative rhetoric of the first century AD and his own philosophical background.⁶⁸

We have already seen how important Epicurus's letters were as a model for Seneca's *Epistulae morales*. Epicurus is indeed the most frequently quoted philosopher, although his presence declines after the first three books, in which most letters end with a “quotable quote” borrowed from him.⁶⁹ As Seneca makes clear, these fulfill a propaedeutic function;⁷⁰ even more important, although he must be given credit for rejecting the widespread disparagement of Epicurus, he is only interested in some of the latter's ethical ideas, totally detached from their philosophical context.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Mazzoli 1989b: 1863.

⁶⁶ We must refer to von Albrecht's contribution, *infra*, pp. 699–744; but we should at least mention Traina's epoch-making work (Traina 1974: cf. *supra*, n. 27). Cf. also Mazzoli 1989b: 1863–1868. For Seneca's peculiar use of the *sermo cotidianus* see Setaioli 1980–1981, now collected and updated in Setaioli 2000: 9–95, 393–397.

⁶⁷ Von Albrecht 2000b: 228 f., 245 f.

⁶⁸ See Setaioli 1985, now collected and updated in Setaioli 2000: 111–217, 397–408. The critics who see a contradiction between Seneca's stylistic theory and his praxis (e.g., Rozelaar 1976: 345–404) disregard not merely the need for a style that appeals to the emotions in the first stage of spiritual direction, but—more important—the internal agreement of Seneca's theory and praxis at a deeper level: Seneca's style is the reflection of his own personality.

⁶⁹ For Seneca and Epicurus, see Setaioli 1988: 171–248. For Seneca's knowledge of Metrodorus, see Setaioli 1988: 249–256.

⁷⁰ *Epist.* 33.1f.

⁷¹ Setaioli 1988: 171, Mazzoli 1989b: 1872. Significantly, Seneca considers such ideas to belong to general common sense (*eiusmodi vocibus referta sunt carmina, refertae historiae. itaque nolo*

As there is no “Epicurean Seneca,” so there is no “Platonic” one, although such a view has been repeatedly defended.⁷² Seneca was surely sensitive to Platonism,⁷³ but did not subscribe to it. He surely knew at least some of Plato’s writings directly, but probably drew many “Platonic” ideas not from the master himself, but from Middle Platonism.⁷⁴

There are also scattered allusions to other philosophical “sources,”⁷⁵ but there can be no doubt that the *Letters*’ basic philosophy is Stoicism⁷⁶—with, of course, the peculiarities and personal innovations we can expect from Seneca’s own statements of autonomy.⁷⁷

For lack of space I must refer to my book on Seneca and the Greeks for Seneca’s complex attitude to the several masters of Stoicism.⁷⁸

The influence of Seneca in general and the *Epistulae* in particular was remarkably powerful in his own time and has remained so to this day—although it has naturally fluctuated over the centuries. Space does not allow us to even begin sketching a summary picture,⁷⁹ and we must limit ourselves to a few bibliographical recommendations for further discussion.⁸⁰

illas Epicuri existimes esse: publicae sunt: epist. 33.2). For the question of Lucilius’s possible leanings toward Epicureanism see *infra*, p. 245 n 48. Mazzoli 1989b: 1872 f. rightly points out that Epicurus was the most readily available philosophical support for Seneca’s retirement from public life.

⁷² This has been done most notably by Donini 1979, 1982: 181–210. Donini has been refuted by Timpanaro 1979, Setaioli 1988: 505–510, Mazzoli 1989b: 1870 f. More recently, Seneca’s “Platonism” has been asserted again by Schönegg 1999; see the convincing refutation by Armisen-Marchetti 2002.

⁷³ We should not forget that his philosophical apprenticeship was under the standard of “Pythagoreanism” (*epist.* 108.17–22).

⁷⁴ Cf. Setaioli 1988: 141–164.

⁷⁵ For this, see Setaioli 1988.

⁷⁶ Cf. also the sensible remarks on the influence of Cynicism and diatribe made by Mazzoli 1989b: 1873 f.; see also Setaioli 1988: 165–170.

⁷⁷ E.g., *epist.* 33.7–11, 80.1; and the whole of *epist.* 84; cf. also *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).3.2. An example of this are Seneca’s ideas about the divine: see Setaioli 2006–2007. Others are probably his reflections on time and literary style (cf. *supra*).

⁷⁸ Setaioli 1988: 257–365; cf. also Mazzoli 1989b: 1874–1877.

⁷⁹ We must refer to Laarmann’s contribution, *supra*, pp. 53–71.

⁸⁰ Blüher 1969, Trillitzsch 1971, Mastandrea 1988, Dionigi (ed.) 1999, Martina (ed.) 2000, Citti and Neri 2001. Many papers on Seneca’s *Fortleben* may also be found in *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 52 (2000) and *Aevum (ant.)* 13 (2000).

DE BENEFICIIS

Mario Lentano

DATES AND SOURCES

De beneficiis is an extensive treatise in seven books about benefits and how to bestow them, about the right way of returning them, and how to deal with ingratitude. It is undoubtedly a work belonging to Seneca's full maturity: the *terminus post quem* is AD 56, whereas the first six books were already composed before the spring or summer of AD 64 (Préchac 1926: xv); more precise dating is controversial (AD 57–58, Herrmann 1937: 99 f.; AD 59–60, Friedrich 1914 and Grimal 1978a: 459; AD 60–61, Chaumartin 1985: 194; AD 59–61, Chaumartin 1989a: 1702–1709; before AD 62, Griffin 1992: 399; Nero's first years, Veyne 1999: 48; between AD 62 and the first months of AD 65, Lo Moro 1976 and Letta 1997–1998) and it depends on interpreting the allusions to Nero either as an attempt to go on guiding the *princeps*'s policy, or as a recognition of the final tyrannical drift of his power.

It is possible to distinguish three sections in the treatise (Fowler 1886): Books 1–4 deal with the doctrine of benefits; Books 5–6 propose a wide and detailed case record, further developed in Book 7, which possibly was added later.

It is not possible to come to definitive conclusions on the sources of *De beneficiis* (see Chaumartin 1985: 21–154, 1989a, 1989b). Hecaton, Panaetius's disciple, who is mentioned four times in the treatise and who is the author of a *Peri kathékontos*, has an importance that is difficult to evaluate, maybe the prevailing one. It has been debated whether Seneca drew material from this treatise, even if very freely, or from a *Peri cháritos* or *Peri charíton* (not attested). The influence of other Stoic sources (Chrysippus, Cleanthes, Posidonius) is unprovable and seems marginal; the Cynic Demetrius, who is mentioned in Book 7, was known directly to Seneca.

The influence of the declamation is more extensive than is thought. It can be observed above all in Book 3: here Seneca writes about the opportunity for a law on ingratitude, provided for by the existing school laws (with a possible allusion to the contemporary debate on *liberti ingrati*, see Manning 1986); the distinction between *beneficium* and *officium* in 3.18 probably dates

back to Hecaton, but its most likely counterpart lies in a text by Seneca the Elder (*contr.* 2.5.13), which deals with an *actio ingrati*; even the debate on the possibility for a son to bestow a benefit on his father echoes themes already widespread in the schools of rhetoric (Lentano 1999).

TOPICS AND CONTENT

Seneca's fundamental theoretical move consists in distinguishing between the act of giving (*beneficium*) and the content of the service (*materia beneficii*): the latter may be returned or not, but the fact remains that the benefit possesses an intrinsic moral value and is in its deepest nature a *res* that *animo geritur* (1.5.2). The same distinction applies to *gratia*, which has become a matter of conscience in Seneca: the one who receives a benefit must never forget his debt (1.4.5), but the return of it may take different forms, from gestures of gratitude to the words used to acknowledge one's debt (*reddit enim beneficium qui debet*: 1.1.3), up to the open will of returning the benefit: at the end of this series there is the Stoic paradox according to which *qui libenter accepit beneficium reddidisse* (2.31.1).

Around this essential kernel, which runs through the treatise, there are other questions: how and to whom to bestow a benefit, how to choose the beneficiary, what kind of benefit to bestow, whom to accept a benefit from, and what sort of manifestations to associate with it; giving without expecting a return is emphasized, showing the gods as models, who bestow benefits on ingrates, too, and give benefits beyond any possibility of returning them.

A varied case record is added to the illustration of the general principles: whether to bestow a promised benefit on an ingrate, whether to return a benefit in any case, whether it is possible to bestow a benefit on oneself, whether one is under an obligation to someone who bestowed a benefit unwittingly, and so on.

RESEARCH

Chaumartin (1989c: 1580f.) sums up the studies about *De beneficiis* from 1945 to 1985 in just one page; even the major monographs (Marchesi 1934, Sørensen 1976, Grimal 1978a, Maurach 1991, Griffin 1992, and Veyne 1999) devote just a few pages to the work. Lack of method, too much space given to case record, repetitiveness, and lack of organization are the most repeated charges and they partly explain the limited attention that scholars have devoted to the work.

A turning point in scholarship was the masterly monograph by Chaumartin (1985). Far from being just an *exercitatio ingenii* aiming at *oblectamentum* (Fuhrmann 1997: 289 f.), *De beneficiis* seems an “œuvre de combat” to Chaumartin (1985: 261), which aims at “restauration la confiance dans les rapports humains” in an atmosphere dominated by the fear and uncertainty caused by the imperial regime. Among the relationships to be reformed there is that between master and slave—a theme that is dear to Seneca—and above all that between clients and patrons (including the emperor), where the good use of benefits can create true bonds of gratitude and friendship between the parties. The aim of the treatise is therefore both moral—a deep reform of the relationships between superiors and inferiors—and political—a warning to the *princeps* not to transform an autocratic regime into the worst tyranny.

Other less convincing interpretations prefer the moral purpose of the treatise, holding that *De beneficiis* as a whole “constitue une doctrine de bonté” (Préchac 1926: xxxv) or that a sort of “société nouvelle” is prefigured in it, where friendship based on *beneficium* will replace existing relationships, which have been spoiled by injustice (Grimal 1978a: 181–183 and 305 f.; see also Grimal 1976: 176 f. and Veyne 1999: 193 f.).

In recent years a sociopolitical reading of *De beneficiis* has been privileged. Seneca is interested above all in the relationships within the élite: he underscores that the advent of the Principate introduces a strong innovation in the practice of benefits. It is expected that the *princeps* behaves as any other member of the élite and that the élite itself involves him in the social code developed in the Republican age. In theory, the *princeps* was a *primus inter pares* and all the parts involved were concerned in keeping this theory. The language of the *beneficium* helps create an appearance of equality between the partners in the exchange, an appearance that gains a new and even greater importance in the new context of the Principate (Griffin 2000, 2002, 2003a, 2003b).

Seneca aims at adapting the model of the exchange of *beneficia* to the new reality of the Empire, where the “power of giving” is concentrated in the *princeps*’s hands. Separating the notion of *gratia* from that of *remuneratio*, Seneca suggests the attitude of a new reciprocity, which allows people not to give up the code of the exchange of gift and counter gift, but which gives an up-to-date pattern to this code (Lentano 2009).

In a society with strong inequalities, individuals might in fact be reluctant to accept a benefit, if they know they could never return it, and this might undermine the social bonds produced by *beneficia*. The emphasis placed by Seneca on the facility of *gratia* is liberating, then, because it promotes

an ethics of the sheer intention that in fact consolidates political and social bonds. Seneca teaches his peers to give freely even if they might come up against ingratitude; he teaches the others to accept serenely the condition of debtors of a *beneficium*, with which one can live with confidence and dignity (Inwood 1995).

De beneficiis offers much material to investigate Seneca's idea of the imperial regime and that of individual princes (see the analytic discussion in Chaumartin 1985: 157–206) or in general to reconstruct the relationship between ethics and power (Bellincioni 1984b: 101 f.). In the opinion of some scholars, Seneca remains faithful to the system, even if he is critical of the emperors (Mayer 1991: 162 f.); others see a radical pessimism in *De beneficiis* as regards the imperial regime, by then viewed as a brutal submission to a *dominus* (Letta 1997–1998).

De beneficiis revolves around a theme—the gift—that has become central in anthropology since Marcel Mauss's studies. In addition to the general analyses of the notion of *beneficium* and of *gratia* in the Roman cultural code (see the bibliography in Lentano 2005), there are also some attempts to apply Mauss's categories to Seneca's treatise, sometimes with some rigidity (Griffe 1994), or to detect Seneca's contribution to a discourse about gifts, which lies somewhere between the societies described by the anthropologists and the modern age (Goux 1996).

The question of gift exchange between father and son is very interesting from an anthropological point of view (3.29 f.): in Roman culture the father seems to be the benefactor *par excellence* (Lentano 2005); but Seneca rejects the widespread opinion that the son's services are no more than a mere return of the benefits received, and are therefore not praiseworthy (Lentano 1999 and Marchese 2005: 29–62).

The section about the relationships between slave and master is undoubtedly the most studied in the entire treatise (3.18–28). The consonance with Stoic doctrine is generally acknowledged, but with different suggestions (Richter 1958, Grimal 1976: 176 f., Mantello 1979: 17–182, Giliberti 1984, Bradley 1986, Manning 1989: 1525–1529, Martini 1989, and Rist 1989: 2008 f.); here again Seneca's position shows some originality.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Of the two types of language—the “linguaggio dell'interiorità” and the “linguaggio della predicazione” (Traina 1987)—the latter prevails in *De beneficiis*, the style of which is less characterized by typical Senecan elements,

such as the *sententia*. The treatise contributes to the specialization of key terms from the Western philosophical tradition, such as *conscientia* (Molenaar 1969) and *persona* (Bellincioni 1981 [1986]: 70–73). The display of *exempla* is rich, often taken from the history of Rome (Mayer 1991); the recourse to the figure of the imaginary objector is extensive.

TRANSMISSION

The main data on the textual tradition of *De beneficiis* are easily summed up by Reynolds (1983a: 363–365; a new, accurate discussion is found in Malaspina 2001a: 13 f.): the oldest manuscript is the *Nazarianus* (*N: Vaticanus Pal. Lat.* 1547), probably copied in the Milan area at the beginning of the ninth century and then moved to Lorsch monastery. The *Reginensis* codex (*R: Vaticanus Reg. Lat.* 1529), dating back to the second quarter of the ninth century and probably written in Northern Italy as well, is regarded as a descendant of *N* (a “caso esemplare di antigrafo e apografo,” Busonero 2000a). It is still considered controversial whether the remaining tradition can be traced back to *R* (Reynolds 1983a; *contra* Mazzoli 1978: 96 f. and Brugnoli 1998: 86). There are almost three hundred *recentiores* and there are also shortened versions, epitomes, *excerpta*, and collections of *sententiae*, which are useful for following the late medieval and modern reception of the treatise but not very meaningful to the constitution of the text.

RECEPTION

A discussion of the reception of *De beneficiis* can be found in the general reviews of Seneca's *Fortleben* (Faider 1921: 135–151, Bourgerie 1922a: 150–186, Gummere 1922, Ross 1974, Chevallier and Poignault 1991, Dionigi 1999, Citti and Neri 2001). Among the Christian writers, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Jerome, Arnobius, and Lactantius quote *De beneficiis* or hint at it (Mastandrea 1988: 43 f., Lo Cicero 1991: 1258–1260, and Brugnoli 2000a: 238–241). The treatise was eclipsed in the early Middle Ages: the first quotation since antiquity perhaps dates back to the third decade of the eleventh century (Mazzoli 1978: 91, Brugnoli 1998: 80, Brugnoli 2000a: 239). The twelfth century is a real *aetas Senecana*; the number of manuscripts rapidly increases (18 copies of *De beneficiis*) and the treatise is widely reflected in *florilegia*, epitomes, and excerpts (Munk Olsen 2000). *De beneficiis* “wurde im Mittelalter als

Traktat der politischen Ethik gewertet¹ (Blüher 1969: 77) and, together with *De clementia*, it establishes the genre of *Fürstenspiegel* (Nothdurft 1963: 100 f., Smiraglia 2000: 275 f.).

Dante quotes *De beneficiis* just once, maybe indirectly (*Conv.* 1.8.16 = *ben.* 2.1.3, see Mezzadrolì 1990: 43 f. and Dionigi 1999: 120 f.), Petrarch knows the treatise well (*De remediis utriusque fortune* 1.93).

After the *editio princeps* of 1475, the editions by Erasmus (1515 and above all 1527–1529, including the *Epistulae*) and by Justus Lipsius (1605) are decisive for Seneca's success in European culture. Montaigne's *Essais* contain hundreds of quotations from Seneca; *De beneficiis* is represented by eight mentions (Blüher 1997: 627 n. 6). The *Grand Siècle* enhances Seneca's reputation as a tragedian, above all but in the *Caractères* by La Bruyère (1688) *De beneficiis* is widely quoted.

The treatise was the first of Seneca's works to be translated into English (1578); later, Ben Jonson transposed a great deal of *De beneficiis* into verse in his *Underwoods* (1640).

In the eighteenth century Diderot expressed a keen appreciation of *De beneficiis* (*Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron*, 1782). Here, Seneca becomes the symbol of the French *philosophes* and of the difficult relationship between intellectuals and power on the very eve of the Revolution.

It is very difficult to follow Senecan reception in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: *De beneficiis* is quoted by both writers and philosophers, but Seneca's current reputation is assured by his letters. In an unusual anthology for a non-specialized audience published in Germany and France, *Seneca for Managers*, *De beneficiis* has no place: a work written for the ancient prince seems to have nothing to say to the modern Caesars of economy and finance.

¹ "In the Middle Ages, [*De beneficiis*] was regarded as dealing with political ethics."

LOST AND FRAGMENTARY WORKS

Anna Maria Ferrero

CONTENT

Among Seneca's lost works,¹ there are a judicial peroration given in Caligula's times,² the request to Nero to be allowed to retire from political life (Grimal 1967b: 131–138), some documents written for Nero: the *laudatio funebris* for the death of Claudius, the prince's first speech in the Senate, and the message to the senators about Agrippina's death.³ We know of numerous letters sent to Caesonius Maximus⁴ (to be identified, perhaps, with the Maximus mentioned in *epist.* 87.2), of a *libellus* sent by Seneca from Corsica to Messalina and to Claudius's freedmen, and of a petition sent from exile to influential persons.⁵ We also know that he wrote ethnographic monographs: *De situ et sacris Aegyptiorum*, *De situ Indiae*,⁶ and philosophical-scientific treatises: *De motu terrarium*⁷ and *De forma mundi*.⁸ We have fragments of a *De matrimonio*,⁹ where Seneca argued in favor of the natural and spiritual need for marriage against those Stoics who advised against it, illustrated the valid reasons for contracting it, and provided negative examples of infidelity and positive examples of virtue; the peroration on modesty closed the work, which also mentioned Indian women's custom of climbing onto their husbands' funeral pyres. We have fragments of *De immatura morte*,¹⁰ where the very concept of a

¹ Only authentic works are examined. No consideration was given to extracts and *excerpta* of various kinds or of anthologies, put together by editors of late Roman and medieval times, among which we should mention *De remediis fortuitorum*, which, in view of its success in the Middle Ages was, wrongly, included in the *editio princeps* of Seneca the philosopher (Vottero 1998: 7–9).

² *Epist.* 49.2.

³ Tac. *ann.* 13.3.1–4, 14.10.3–11, 53 f.

⁴ Mart. 7.45.1–4.

⁵ Cass. Dio 61.10, Birt 1911b: 596–601.

⁶ Serv. *Aen.* 6.154, 9.30.

⁷ *Nat.* 6.4.2.

⁸ Cassiod. 2.6.4.

⁹ Hier. *Iov.* 1.41–49, Grossgerge 1911, Bickel 1915: 382–394, Frassinetti 1955: 186–188.

¹⁰ Lact. *inst.* 1.5.26, 3.12.11.

premature death is denied; of *De superstitione*;¹¹ of *De officiis*,¹² on the duties of daily life; of *Quomodo amicitia continenda sit*, on how to make up with friends after quarreling and how to distinguish friends from flatterers (Bickel 1905b: 190–201, Studemund 1969 [1888]: 13–24, 26–32); of a moral philosophy treatise: *Libri moralis philosophiae*;¹³ and of *De vita patris*.¹⁴ We also have quotes taken from a protreptic to philosophy, *Exhortationes*,¹⁵ in which, according to a codified modulus, the premise on the need to study philosophy as the sole path to happiness was followed by adversaries' objections and their rebuttal, an adage (*Omnes odit, qui malos odit*).¹⁶ We have the memory of his last words, pertaining to considerations on the inevitability of fate, on firmness when confronted with adversities, on contempt for death, some added provisions to his will and testament, and *codicilli* containing instructions for his own funeral.¹⁷ It is not possible to identify the two works *De piscium natura* and *De lapidum natura*, which are mentioned only by Plin. *nat.* 9.53.167 and in the bibliographical index of *nat.* 36.¹⁸

DATES

The only known element is the date of the *Libri moralis philosophiae*, late AD 64 to early 65. For the other writings, the following chronology can be established with a certain approximation: *De situ et sacris Aegyptiorum* and *De situ Indiae* (AD 17–19); *De matrimonio* (AD 38–39); *De motu terrarum* (early exile years); *De forma mundi* (during the exile); *De officiis* (AD 60); *De amicitia* (AD 62–63); *De immatura morte* (AD 63–64); *De superstitione* (summer of 64); *Exhortationes* (fall of 64).

TOPICS AND SOURCES

Both as an orator and as the writer of Nero's speeches, Seneca, according to Quint. *inst.* 10.125–131 and Tac. *ann.* 12.69–13.4, was very favorably received

¹¹ Aug. *civ.* 6.10 f., Diom. 379.15–19 K.

¹² Diom. 336.9 K.

¹³ *Epist.* 106.1–3, 108.1.39, 109.1.14.17, Lact. *inst.* 1.16.10, 2.2.14 f., 6.17.28.

¹⁴ Cf. Winterbottom, *infra*, p. 695.

¹⁵ Lact. *inst.* 1.5.27, 1.7.5.13, 3.15.1.11–14, 16.15, 23.14, 25.16, 5.13.20, 6.24.12.16–17, 25.3.

¹⁶ Aug. *epist.* 153.14.

¹⁷ Tac. *ann.* 15.60–65, 67.3, Treves 1970: 507–524, Gnifka 1979: 5–21, Abel 1991: 3155–3181, Fabbri 1978–1979: 409–427.

¹⁸ Vottero 1998: 89–91.

by the public, whereas he was the object of much criticism as the emperor's master of eloquence (Avery 1958: 167–169, Gelzer 1970: 212–223). Nothing definite can be said of Seneca as a poet: the *poemata* and the *carmina* mentioned by Quint. *inst.* 10.129 and Tac. *ann.* 14.52.1–3 refer to the entire Senecan poetic production including the tragedies and the collection of the epigrams;¹⁹ the poetic pieces mentioned by Plin. *epist.* 6.3.2.5 (perhaps epigrams, in view of the Plinian context) have not survived.

Of the letters sent by Seneca to Caesonius Maximus, at least some were written from Corsica, since Mart. 7.45.1–4 places the information about the correspondence in a context taken up exclusively by the theme of exile and by that of faithfulness in friendship. Sources of the monograph on geography and the rites of the Egyptians, and of the one on India, could be the studies of Posidonius and the ethnographic digressions present in Sallustian works, but it should be noted that Seneca always had a lively interest in Egypt, as attested by the book *nat.* 4a, whose topic is the Nile floods. While India had long been known through reports by Alexander the Great's generals, it apparently remained, in Seneca's opinion, a region inhabited by barbarians and the subject of naturalistic curiosity (André and Filliozat 1986).

The fragments of *De matrimonio* are all preserved by Hier. *Iov.* 1.41–49, an argumentative response to the lost *Commentarioli* by the monk Iovinianus. Of the treatise on earthquakes we are informed by Seneca himself in *nat.* 6.4.2 and, since we have no other information about it, the title is traditionally derived from this context. In it, Seneca probably followed the pneumatic theory, which in the Stoic school was held by Posidonius. From Cassiod. 2.6.4 we learn the title of the work *De forma mundi*, typical theme of Greek cosmologies, which discussed the cosmos in general, its shape, and the various problems connected to it. The Stoics attributed a spherical shape to the cosmos and Seneca shared this opinion.

On the *De officiis* we only have the report of the grammarian Diomedes, who, in discussing the verb *praestare*, after observing that it is mostly used in the sense of *melius esse* or *antecedere* or *superare*, mentions among the exceptions an example taken from the work in question. Treatises of this kind already exist in Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus. The issue was taken up again by Panaetius and by Posidonius; the Stoic model also inspired M. Iunius Brutus, whose treatise on duties is quoted and used by Seneca in *epist.* 95.45. The fragments taken from *De amicitia*, in spite of some generic consonance, do not reveal a specific source in any of the ancient texts on the topic known

¹⁹ Traina 1976: 19.

to us (Panaetius, Hecaton). The friendship theme was already present in the first letters to Lucilius, then procurator in Sicily; this period seems to have an echo in the ample space occupied in the fragments by the absence of friends and faithfulness to them, as Lucilius had demonstrated in those difficult years.

The problem of death, the subject of *De immatura morte*, is one of the most widely debated themes in Hellenistic philosophical treatises. When confronting it, Seneca's position stands out not so much for its originality, as for the persistence, conviction, and effectiveness with which he expounds some fundamental concepts: death as a law of nature, equal for all; death as liberation; the need to despise the terror it strikes; the ease with which it can hit us at any time; the *praemeditatio mortis* as the philosopher's foremost duty and essential step in his path toward wisdom; voluntary death as supreme choice and conquest of freedom. Seneca constantly repeated these thoughts, and similar ones, from his first to his last surviving works: hence, it is not groundless to hypothesize their presence in *De immatura morte* as well.²⁰ The title, on which the manuscripts agree, is consistent with Senecan use.

Of the treatise *De superstitione* we have a mention by Tert. *apol.* 12.6, who, discrediting the statues of pagan gods (the materials used, the manner of execution, and their cold and nearly corpse-like appearance) refers to the similar criticisms with which Seneca targeted the cult of images. The ten actual fragments are preserved by Aug. *civ.* 6.10 f., who points out the contradictions between Seneca's deepest convictions and his external behavior, but, since he merely draws almost exclusively on the *exempla* and mentions neither the inner structure of the dialog nor the arrangement of the subject matter, he deprives us of the theoretical and doctrinal part connected to it (Herrmann 1970: 389–396, Funke 1974: 149, Traina 1977 (1987): 171–192, and Lozza 1989). The grammarian Diomedes provides us with the locution *versa templa*, which, out of context, adds little to our knowledge of the treatise. As his certain source we can point out only Varro Reatinus (Pépin 1956: 265–294) and, in general, the tradition of the Stoic school, which pointed to superstition as one of the components of fear, viewed by the Stoics as one of the fundamental passions.²¹

The *Exhortationes* belong to the mother lode of philosophically oriented protreptic literature, which, originating from Socrates's teachings, opposes the Sophists' didactic practice. It is difficult to reconstruct the context of the work, because the fragments that have reached us are short, sparse, and dispersed in the various books of Lact. *inst.*, who only quotes the passages

²⁰ Lausberg 1970: 153–167.

²¹ Scarpat 1983: 98, André 1983: 55–71, Mazzoli 1984: 953–1000.

functional to his argument against pagans, which perhaps explains the high number of fragments about God (Mazzoli 1977: 7–47). Protreptic features are present throughout Seneca's work. A comparison between *epist.* 16.1–6 and our fragments allows us to suppose that a premise on the need for *sapientiae studium* would be followed by the adversaries' topical objections on the inconsistency between the philosophers' words and deeds and the reply by Seneca, who in conclusion must have argued that only through the philosophical *ars* does human free will meet and identify with divine will. Among the sources of the work we can include, for its affinity to Seneca's themes, Cicero's *Hortensius*, a lost work, but one that can be reconstructed through numerous quotes by Lactantius, Augustinus, and Nonius Marcellus.²² It is impossible to specify the influence of other protreptics, both Greek and Latin, of which we often have only the title, a few mentions, or some fragments.

The content of the *Libri moralis philosophiae* cannot be specified from the surviving fragments, whether it pertains either to the divinity or to the *sapiens* and his opposite, themes that are present throughout Seneca's works (Leeman 1953: 307–313). Of some tenability is the work's subdivision of ethics dating back to Eudorus of Alexandria, in the first century BC, of which we also partly know a text, *On the Division of Philosophical Discourse*. Thus latter text apparently had some influence on subsequent tradition and above all on the Stoics, who divided ethics into theory, impulse doctrine, and action doctrine (Lieberg 1973: 63–115). Thus, we can hypothesize that Seneca's treatise contained a theoretical part and a practical part, linked together in a unitary discourse through one, or more, mediating sections.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Nothing can be said about the fragments' language and style because, as is well known, in ancient rhetorical practice each author made the quote his own and gave it a personal expression.

TRANSMISSION

In 1605 Iustus Lipsius published in Antwerp the first edition of all Seneca's writings, including all the fragments, which he placed before the surviving writings, at the end of the introduction. This was followed by F. Haase's

²² Grilli 1976.

new edition (Leipzig 1853), which included the fragments in volume III, pages 418–445. There were 128 fragments, distributed under twenty different indices without any apparent logical or chronological order: poems were first, followed by scientific treatises; philosophical works were interspersed with orations and letters. The edition lacked both a critical apparatus and comments. In 1902 the fragments were reprinted as a supplement to a new edition of the entire Senecan works. In 1971, Trillitzsch collected and published the fragments, still without providing critical apparatus or commentary. D. Vottero's 1998 edition is distinguished by its scholarly introduction, critical apparatus, Italian translation, rich commentary, and ample bibliography.

RECEPTION

We know that *De forma mundi* was present in Cassiodorus's library, accompanied by the advice to read it, which was given to the monks, and that *De officiis* inspired Martinus, Archbishop of Braga, around AD 572 his *Formula vitae honestae*.

Alfons Fürst

The pseudepigraphic correspondence between Seneca and Paul consists of fourteen short letters, eight allegedly by the philosopher, six by the apostle. They were written by an unknown author in the second half of the fourth century before AD 392/93, when they were first mentioned by Jerome in his *De viris illustribus* (*vir. ill.* 12).

The most striking peculiarity of these letters is the lack of nearly any content. Only one letter deals with a historical topic, namely the great fire of Rome and the subsequent persecution of the Christians under the reign of Nero in AD 64 (*epist.* 11). But, in contrast to what one might expect from an exchange of letters between these famous men, the author is concerned neither with Seneca's philosophy nor with Paul's theology. There are only a few scanty hints at philosophical, theological, and biblical matters, and all of them demonstrate the author's inability in this regard (Fürst 1998: 80–88).

Since the author is obviously not interested in such topics, scholars have proposed divergent hypotheses to explain the intention of his pseudepigraphic writing. Barlow (1938: 89–92), the editor of the first critical edition based on twenty-five manuscripts from the ninth to the twelfth centuries, considered it an exercise of style in a school of rhetoric in Late Antiquity, because many rhetorical terms are used in all the letters. Since, in some letters, "Seneca" exhorts "Paul" to use a good style in writing his letters (*epist.* 7, 9, 13), Bocciolini Palagi (1985: 13–16), who twice edited a revised version of Barlow's edition supplemented with a useful philological commentary, interpreted the text as a pleading for the use of classical language in Christian writings (see also Natali 1995: 35–40). Bickel (1959b: 95) suggested that the reason to write these letters was the fascinating idea that "Seneca" should preach the Christian gospel to the Roman emperor (*epist.* 3, 7, 8, 9, 14). Westerborg (1881: 30, 37) detected an anti-Paulinian intention: The author wanted to bring disrepute upon Paul in connecting him with Nero, his infamous second wife Poppaea, and his mentor and minister Seneca who, as the "teacher of a tyrant" (Cass. Dio 61.10.2; cf. Auson. *grat. act.* 31), was in bad repute among the pagans of Late Antiquity. On the contrary, following Harnack (1893: 765, 1904: 458 f.), many scholars (for example, Bocciolini Palagi 1985: 15 f. and Malherbe

1991: 417 f., 421) surmise that this exchange of letters was meant to recommend the epistles of Paul to pagan intellectuals interested in Christianity.

The question as to the intention of this curious text without any content remained unsolved, however. As Malherbe (1991: 417–421) has noticed, it consists of letters of friendship in which traditional commonplaces were used extensively. Therefore, Fürst (1998: 88–94, 2006: 13–16) argued for considering its genre. In such letters of friendship, there is no need for any content. Hence, the only intention is to portray Seneca as a friend of Paul's. The reason for this is to be seen in Seneca's *Nachleben* in Late Antiquity. Among Latin Christian theologians, Seneca was highly esteemed as a philosopher whose opinions often corresponded with Christian beliefs—*Seneca saepe noster*, as Tertullian said (*De anima* 20.1). For Lactantius, Seneca was almost a Christian (cf. *inst.* 1.5.26, 1.5.28, 6.24.14). This is exactly the relation of Seneca to Christianity put forward in the last letter of the exchange where “Paul” writes that “Seneca” “has nearly reached the irreprehensible wisdom” (*epist.* 14). By means of a fictitious exchange of letters between Seneca and Paul, the author underlined the affinity between the pagan philosopher Seneca and the Latin Christian theologians of the fourth century, inventing an apostolic tradition: Seneca, while not yet a Christian, was nevertheless supposed to have been a close friend of Paul's (Fürst 1998: 103–117, 2006: 18–21).

Although the style of these letters is awkward, with many passages that are difficult to understand, the fiction that Seneca was a friend of Paul's became highly influential. During the Middle Ages, several theologians referred to the friendship between the two men, as was testified by their alleged correspondence (testimonies are gathered by Barlow 1938: 110–112 and Fürst 2006: 68–82). From the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, the text was transmitted in more than 300 manuscripts, in most cases together with the twelfth chapter of Jerome's *De viris illustribus* at the beginning of collections of Seneca's works. In the times of early humanism, as Momigliano (1950: 336) and Sottili (2004: 676–678) have shown, the letters, especially the last one, gave rise to the legend that Seneca was a Christian, a legend that had proponents until the nineteenth century (Walter 2006: 129–132). After Lorenzo Valla and Paulus Pompilius had impugned the correspondence's authenticity in 1440 and 1490, respectively (Faider 1926: 116), Erasmus of Rotterdam (*epist.* 2092), editing Seneca's works in 1515, demonstrated that this exchange of letters was a fake.

PART TWO

PHILOSOPHY

Topics

ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY*

Mireille Armisen-Marchetti

It is futile to seek a systematic treatment of the “science of being” in Seneca: what we do find in his work are merely scattered, more or less developed remarks appended to moral or scientific discussions, or, in the *Epistles*, in answer to a question asked by Lucilius—and, nearly every time this happens, Seneca apologizes for straying into the field of dialectics. What we know from other sources about the positions of Stoicism in this regard, however, permits us to view Seneca’s remarks as parts of an organic whole and to appreciate their consistency. Still, we should be very careful and proceed from Seneca to Stoicism, rather than from Stoicism to Seneca; in other words, we must not read our philosopher merely in the light of external references, but rather start from his own text, and only after try to explain it through what we know—or believe we know—about Stoic doctrine. If we do so, we will realize that Seneca is well versed in Stoicism and the way it dealt with these problems, but also that he has no qualms about taking a position when he is faced with opposing doctrinal stands, or even proposing a personal view. On the other hand, the very area of the question to be treated—ontology—poses some problems, as it does not fit any Stoic doctrinal partition. What the moderns call “ontology” covers a field that falls astride Stoic logic and physics, and the demarcation of this field is largely arbitrary. The definition of “epistemology” poses the same problem. In order not to encroach on other sections of this volume, we have thought it advisable to understand it not as the study of the *methods* of knowledge, but rather as the description of the *domain* of knowledge: a description undertaken by the Stoics, including Seneca, through the concept of the “parts of philosophy.”

* My warm thanks to my friend and colleague Aldo Setaioli for translating this chapter from French into English.

1. ONTOLOGY

1.1.

According to the Stoics the world and the beings it contains result from the combination of two principles, one active, the other passive:¹

Sen. *epist.* 65.2: *Dicunt, ut scis, Stoici nostri duo esse in rerum natura, ex quibus omnia fiant, causam et materiam. Materia iacet iners, res ad omnia parata, cessatura, si nemo moveat. Causa autem, id est ratio, materiam format et quocumque vult versat, ex illa varia opera producit.*

Our Stoics say, as you know, that there are in nature two [principles] from which all things proceed, cause and matter. Matter lies inert, ready to become anything, but idle, if not moved by anyone. As for cause, that is reason, it imparts form to matter and turns it whatever way it wishes, thus producing different things from it.

Stoici nostri: this is in fact an essential doctrine of their system. It was upheld by all Stoics, who designate these principles by the term ἀρχαί.² In the text quoted above Seneca uses a periphrasis (*duo ex quibus omnia fiant*), but elsewhere he translates the Greek term by *principia* (*epist.* 93.9) or *initia* (*epist.* 65.19, 90.29).

The first principle (the order has no special meaning beyond Seneca's choice of enumeration) is matter, *materia*, which, further down, will be identified as the passive principle.³ *Materia* corresponds to οὐσία, which denotes the sum total of matter in the cosmos.⁴ By contrast, the matter individual things are made of is designated by the Greek Stoics with the term ὕλη, which Seneca translates either by *substantia*, or, again, *materia*.⁵ The *materia* is *iners* (ἄπαιος), that is, devoid of qualities in and by itself; it is *res*

¹ In addition to the *SVF*, Long and Sedley (1987: chap. 44) provide a review and commentary of the main Stoic texts concerning principles. For principles in Stoicism, cf., among others, Duhot 1989: 73–86, Muller 2006: 66–68. As far as Seneca is concerned, the most recent treatment of the question is Wildberger 2006: I 3–7.

² See, among others, Diog. Laert. 7.134, who attributes it in turn to Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Archedemus, and Posidonius.

³ Sen. *epist.* 65.3: *materia patiens dei*. Cf. *SVF* II 300, 301: πάσχον, πάσχειν.

⁴ Cf. *SVF* II 300. In Epistle 58.6 Seneca defines οὐσία in the following way: οὐσία, *res necessaria, natura continens fundamentum omnium*; he proposes to render οὐσία by *essentia*, referring to precedents in Cicero and Papirius Fabianus; neither of these texts has survived. This translation by *essentia*, however, remains isolated, and Seneca resorts more often to *materia* or *substantia*. For *materia*, cf. *epist.* 65.12, 65.19, 65.23 f.; *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).4.2, 5.6, *nat.* 1 *pr.* 3, 16, 2.2.1.

⁵ ὕλη: *SVF* II 300, 301. *Substantia*: Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).7.4, *epist.* 58.15, *nat.* 1.6.4, 1.15.6. *Materia*: Sen. *benef.* 6.2.2, *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).5.9, *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*).26.6.

ad omnia parata, undifferentiated and displaying no preference concerning the active principle's action.⁶ The word *res* is an approximation, since matter is not, properly speaking, a "thing," a body, inasmuch as it is unable to exist by itself cut off from the qualities imparted to it by the active principle: this is how we must understand Seneca's last remark, *cessatura, si nemo moveat*.

The second principle is the active one; at § 12 of the same Epistle 65 it will be denoted as *ratio faciens*, a translation of *ποιεῖν*. This imparts form to matter and fashions it according to its wish (*quocumque vult versat*, which echoes and reverses what is said of matter, *res ad omnia cessatura*): this means that it bestows qualities upon matter, thus creating, as we shall see below, the differentiated bodies. Seneca designates this principle through different appellatives, which, taken together, permit us to gain a complete notion of the idea. Here, in Epistle 65, where Seneca's purpose is to emphasize the singleness of the Stoic cause as compared with the plurality of Platonic and Aristotelian causes, it is called *causa*:⁷ by this, Seneca points out that Stoic ontology is grounded on a single causality, represented by the active principle. This principle, on the other hand, may also be viewed as the divine reason immanent in the world: therefore, still in the same letter, Seneca calls it *ratio* and *deus*, thus conforming to Stoic habit.⁸ Finally, when it is viewed as acting within the differentiated beings in the world, it may also be associated with *natura*: "what else is nature but god and divine reason mixed with and within the world as a whole as well as with and within its parts?"⁹

1.2.

The interplay of the two, active and passive, principles gives rise to all beings, first to the elements—fire, air, water, earth¹⁰—then to the differentiated bodies resulting from the combination of the elements. The way in which the

⁶ SVF II 301 τὴν δὲ ὕλην πάσχειν τε καὶ τρέπεσθαι.

⁷ Cf. also Sen. *epist.* 89.16. SVF II 311: "the substance of what exists, being unmoving and amorphous by itself, must be moved and receive form from some cause."

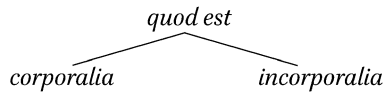
⁸ SVF II 300: "the active principle is the reason acting within it (viz. matter), god." *Ratio*: Sen. *epist.* 65.2, 65.12, *benef.* 4.7.1, *nat.* 1 *pr.* 16. *Deus*: Sen. *epist.* 65.23, 58.27, *benef.* 4.7.1, *nat.* 1 *pr.* 16, *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).4.2. Cf. SVF II 301, 311, 312, 313.

⁹ Sen. *benef.* 4.7.1: *quid enim aliud est natura quam deus et divina ratio toti mundo partibusque eius inserta?*

¹⁰ Sen. *epist.* 89.16: *ipse <de> elementis locus, ut quidam putant, simplex est, ut quidam, in materiam et causam omnia moventem et elementa dividitur; dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).19.1: *elementa [sunt] quattuor; ignis, aquae, aeris, terrae*. The theory of the elements falls within physics: cf. Long and Sedley 1987: chap. 47, Wildberger 2006: I 60–79.

multiplicity of being becomes organized by grouping into species (*species*) and genera (*genera*) is treated in Epistle 58, where we find a complex ontological outline, which is somewhat puzzling, as it appears to be isolated within the Stoic tradition known to us. In this letter Seneca reproduces—so he tells us—a lecture by a scholarly friend concerning the six modes of being according to Plato.¹¹ Within this report he inserts a section that he presents as his own (*si indicavero: epist.* 58.8), with the alleged intention of discovering “the first genus [...] from which all other species depend, whence all division derives, within which all things are comprised.”¹²

In order to discover this first genus, Seneca proceeds by an upward path, as was customary in the schools, gradually going back from the species “man” to the supreme genus “what is,” *quod est* (translating τὸ ὄν, in accordance with the linguistic equivalence posed in Epistle 58.7). The *quod est* subsumes the bodies and the incorporeals, with no third class of beings, and—Seneca insists—undoubtedly amounts to the supreme genus.¹³ We thus get this first ontological outline:



This outline, it must be emphasized, is the one Seneca adopts as his own, but it is poorly attested in the remaining tradition.¹⁴ In fact, in the Stoic testimonies concerning the genera of being, the supreme genus subsuming bodies and incorporeals is called τί.¹⁵

¹¹ In order to appreciate to what extent this section of the letter can be considered to mirror real Platonic thinking, cf. Setaioli's analysis (1988: 137–140); also Gersh 1986: 188–194, Chaumartin 1993b.

¹² Sen. *epist.* 58.8: *primum illud genus [...] ex quo ceterae species suspensae sunt, a quo nascitur omnis divisio, quo universa comprehensa sunt.*

¹³ Sen. *epist.* 58.11: “*quod est*” aut corporale est aut incorporale; 58.14: “*quod est*” in has species divido, ut sint corporalia aut incorporalia: nihil tertium est. This is no doubt the supreme genus: *epist.* 58.12: *illud genus “quod est” <est> generale, supra se nihil habet; initium rerum est; omnia sub illo sunt*; 58.13: *illud genus [...] merito primum poni.*

¹⁴ For τὸ ὄν as supreme genus one may quote Diog. Laert. 7.61: “supreme genus is what is genus without itself belonging to a genus, as is τὸ ὄν”; this is a weak testimony, however, since “as is τὸ ὄν” is not well attested in the manuscripts. On the other hand, Philo (*de agr.* 139) similarly divides τὰ ὄντα into bodies and incorporeals, but although this passage has been collected in *SVF* II 182, we are not sure it is Stoic; it is interesting that this division of beings is combined with a downward division of bodies, as in Epistle 58.12.

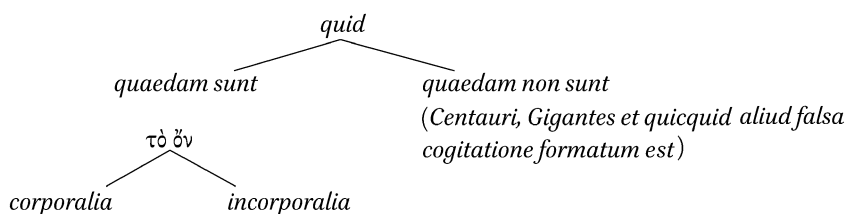
¹⁵ *SVF* II 330 and 331. Elsewhere, τὸ ὄν is only referred to bodies: *SVF* II 329ab.

Notwithstanding, Seneca adds, some Stoics want to superpose on the genus *quod est* “another still higher and more essential genus,” *aliud genus magis principale* (*epist.* 58.13), the *quid* (clearly the translation of $\tau\iota$). This *quid* comprises not merely beings, but also non-beings:

Epist. 58.15: *In rerum, inquit, natura quaedam sunt, quaedam non sunt, et haec autem, quae non sunt, rerum natura complectitur, quae animo succurrunt, tamquam Centauri, Gigantes et quicquid aliud falsa cogitatione formatum habere aliquam imaginem coepit, quamvis non habeat substantiam.*

In nature, so they say, some things are (*quaedam sunt*), others are not (*quaedam non sunt*); nature comprises also the things that are not, those that appear to our mind, such as the Centaurs or the Giants, and everything else that received a form through false imagination and began to present an image, though being devoid of substance.

Quid ($\tau\iota$), as we just said, is in fact attested as the supreme genus in Stoic texts. Seneca, however, has said that the *quid* superposed itself¹⁶ on the *quod est*: we must therefore understand that *quaedam sunt* is equivalent to the former *quod est*, and subdivide *quaedam sunt* into bodies and incorporeals, which results into the following outline:



The most striking originality of this second outline is the integration of the *quaedam non sunt* into the genus *quid*, and the identification of these non-beings with *quae animo succurrunt*, themselves explicated by *Centauri, Gigantes et quicquid aliud falsa cogitatione formatum*. These non-beings, therefore, are identical with imaginary mental representations, which are not bodies as they lack substance. They appear to correspond to what the Stoics called the $\nu\omicron\omicron\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha$, “concepts” formed through mental operations based on material provided by sensible experience: we do in fact find, among the examples of $\nu\omicron\omicron\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha$, Tityos and the Centaur¹⁷—which, however,

¹⁶ Sen. *epist.* 58.13: *Stoici volunt superponere huic.*

¹⁷ Diog. Laert. 7.52 f. = *SVF* II 87: Diogenes distinguishes the concepts ($\nu\omicron\omicron\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha$) formed through contact, resemblance, analogy, transference, composition, and opposition. As an

poses a problem, inasmuch as, in the Stoic system, the νοούμενα are *not* non-beings.¹⁸ On the other hand, the words “everything else that received a form through false imagination (*falsa cogitatione*) and began to present an image (*habere aliquam imaginem coepit*), though being devoid of substance” seem to us to have a parallel in a passage of the *De tranquillitate animi*. There the idea is expressed not in ontological, but in psychological terms, by appealing to the theory of mental representation. Seneca is speaking about the hallucinations of the insane: “false images of things perturb the insane; [...] they are aroused by the appearance of something, whose vanity is not apprehended by their flawed mind.”¹⁹ The terminology is the same as in Epistle 58.15 quoted *supra*: *falsae (imagines) / falsa (cogitatione); imagines / imaginem*. What follows, *proritat illos alicuius rei species*, proves that what Seneca has in mind here is the type of false perception that the Stoics called φάντασμα.²⁰

The origin of Seneca’s second outline cannot be ascertained. According to an old hypothesis,²¹ τὸ ὄν might have been the supreme genus in the primal Stoic outline (corresponding to Seneca’s first outline), and later replaced by the τί through Chrysippus’s agency. But J. Brunschwig, in a convincing essay,²² establishes a quite different chronology, according to which the primal Stoic outline posed the τί as the supreme genus subsuming bodies and incorporeals, the latter being conceived of as non-beings. This was replaced by a second outline, illustrated by Seneca in Epistle 58.11 f. and 14, with τὸ ὄν / *quod est* subsuming bodies and incorporeals, the latter being conceived of as a mode of being. Finally, a third, later outline appeared: the one mentioned by Seneca under the genus τί (*epist.* 58.13 and 15), trying to reconcile the two previous ones with each other by re-establishing, besides the beings, *quaedam sunt*, a class of non-beings, *quaedam non sunt*, made up of the νοούμενα conceived through mental operations.

example of concepts by analogy, he offers Tityos; as an example of concepts by composition, the Centaur.

¹⁸ For the question of the genera of Stoic being, and for the problem posed by Seneca’s own outline in *epist.* 58, cf. Rist 1969: 152–158, Hadot 1968: 156–162, Pasquino 1978, Brunschwig 1988, Wildberger 2006: I 92–99.

¹⁹ Sen. *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).12.5: *insanos falsae rerum imagines agitant; [...] proritat illos alicuius rei species, cuius vanitatem capta mens non coarguit.*

²⁰ SVF II 54: “the *phantasma* is what we are drawn to through an attraction devoid of content (διάκενον ἐλκυσμόν) due to the imagination. This happens to the melancholic and the insane.”

²¹ Zeller 1904: 94, appealing, besides our Seneca text, to Diog. Laert. 7.61 (cf. note 14).

²² Brunschwig 1988.

On her part, J. Wildberger²³ appears to emphasize a meaningful point when she attributes to Seneca the intention to polemicize with Plato: with the first outline, the one in Epistle 58.11 f. and 14, Seneca's object is, according to her, to stress the contrast between the multiple modes of being he attributes to Plato in the rest of the letter and the simplicity of his own *quod est*. As far as the distinction of genera, which Seneca appends to the *quid* of "certain Stoics" (*epist.* 58.15) is concerned, Wildberger believes that it is meant to utterly deny ontological status to the *cogitabilia* (*epist.* 58.16), which for Plato represent the veritable form of being.

1.3.

Continuing our survey of the different branches of the ontological outline in Epistle 58, we shall now consider the *quae(dam) sunt*, the beings, and their subdivision into bodies and incorporeals. How does Seneca define the substance and meaning of the genus "body"? In Epistle 58.9–11 he adopts at first an upward procedure of classification, as was customary in the schools, proceeding from the species "man" and "dog" to the genus of "animals" (*animalia*), then from the genus of animals to the genus of "animate beings" (*animantia*), from the genus of animate beings to that of "bodies" (*corpora*), and finally, as we have seen above, from the bodies to the *quod est*. A downward classification appears in Epistle 58.12: starting from the *genus generale* (the *quod est*), Seneca goes back down to the individuals, Cato, Cicero, Lucretius (we should not miss the Roman nature of these examples, which testifies to the fact that Seneca has deeply assimilated this classification, whose peak is occupied by the *quod est*).

Bodies, too, receive their own definition, which falls within the fields of both ontology and physics. The most meaningful texts are Epistles 106 and 117, which present elements totally in keeping with what we know from other sources about Stoic doctrine. A body is, in the first place, what acts and is acted upon: this statement, which goes back to Zeno, returns several times in the *Epistles*.²⁴ This definition functions as support for several argumentations, often developed in the form of syllogisms. Such is the case with Seneca's demonstration of the corporeal nature of good: good acts, since it is useful; now, what acts is a body.²⁵ Besides, good acts upon the soul, and this is the

²³ Wildberger 2006: I: 99.

²⁴ Sen. *epist.* 117.10: *et quod fit et quod facit corpus est*; also *epist.* 106.4, 117.2. The definition goes back to Zeno (*SVF* I 90, 146) and Cleanthes (*SVF* I 518). Conversely, according to Chrysippus, incorporeals are unable to act and be acted upon: *SVF* II 363.

²⁵ Sen. *epist.* 106.4: *bonum facit; prodest enim; quod facit corpus est*.

hallmark of a body.²⁶ The homogeneous nature of body and soul is proved by the fact that both reciprocally act upon each other; therefore passions are also bodies, inasmuch as they can affect the expression of a face, making it blush or blanch.²⁷ By the same token and for the same reasons, virtues are bodies too.²⁸

A body is also characterized by its capability to touch and be touched: "Can it ever be doubted that that by which something can be touched is a body? In fact, 'nothing except a body can touch and be touched,' as Lucretius says."²⁹ Therefore, what is capable of affecting a body is itself a body: "Nothing can befall without contact; what touches a body is a body."³⁰ A body has some further characteristics: being able to move ("what is endowed with movement is a body")³¹ and—as a natural consequence—possessing a *vis* enabling it both to move and to resist movement: "Besides, all that possesses a force permitting it to shove, constrain, withhold, and restrain is a body [...]. What rules a body is a body, what acts by force upon a body is a body."³² We recognize the Stoic idea according to which a body is characterized by tridimensionality and resistance, ἀντιστοιχία, all bodily action consisting of a play of shoves, shocks, and resistance, without which neither affecting nor being affected could ever take place.³³

1.4.

The second branch of the genus *quod est*, according to the ontological outline of Epistle 58, are the *incorporalia*: this division, firmly established in Epistle 58, is reaffirmed in Epistle 89.³⁴ The term *incorporale*, in the Stoic technical sense, appears repeatedly in Seneca's writings.³⁵ The philosopher

²⁶ Sen. epist. 106.4: *bonum agitat animum et quodammodo format et continet, quae [ergo] propria sunt corporis.*

²⁷ Sen. epist. 106.5: *quid ergo? tam manifestas notas corporis credis imprimi nisi a corpore?*

²⁸ Sen. epist. 106.7: *corpora ergo sunt quae [scil. virtutes] colorem habitumque corporum mutant, quae in illis regnum suum exercent.*

²⁹ Sen. epist. 106.8: *numquid est dubium an id quo quid tangi potest corpus sit? "tangere enim et tangi nisi corpus nulla potest res," ut ait Lucretius [Lucr. 1.304].*

³⁰ Sen. epist. 117.7: *nihil enim accidere sine tactu potest; quod tangit corpus, corpus est.*

³¹ Sen. epist. 117.7: *quod motum habet corpus est.* SVF II 387: "all that moves is a body."

³² Sen. epist. 106.9f.: *etiam nunc cui tanta vis est ut inpellat et cogat et retineat et inhibeat corpus est. [...] quod imperat corpori corpus est, quod vim corpori adfert, corpus.*

³³ SVF II 315, 343: "what acts in a bodily fashion and what is acted upon is acted upon in the same way, since they [what acts and is acted upon] need a shove, resistance and shocks, and it could not be otherwise"; II 381, 501.

³⁴ Sen. epist. 58.11: *quid est aut corporale est aut incorporale*; 58.14, 89.16.

³⁵ Sen. dial. 10 (= brev.).8.1, benef. 6.2.2, epist. 117.3 and 10. Two further occurrences, appearing not in passages where Seneca expounds his own ideas, but in doxographical listings, do not fall within the area of Stoicism: at dial. 12 (= cons. Helv.).8.3 reason is qualified as *incorporalis*,

nowhere offers a list of the incorporeals, but the Stoic sources inform us that canonically it included vacuum, place, time, and *λεκτόν*, that is, three physical entities and a logical one.³⁶

Seneca refers to the incorporeal “time” at *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*) 8.1, where he characterizes time as *res incorporealis*, which *sub oculos non venit*. It is possible to reconstruct Seneca’s reasoning, which is founded upon perfectly Stoic notions: vision is a sensible contact; but only bodies can touch and be touched;³⁷ therefore an incorporeal cannot fall under the eye. Epistle 58 associates vacuum and time: “the sixth genus [of being] is that of quasi-existing things, like vacuum or time.”³⁸ But although the coupling *inane/tempus* and the expression *quae quasi sunt* appear to be reminiscent of the Stoics’ description of the incorporeals, this passage, in which Seneca purports to describe the modes of being “according to Plato,” can hardly pass as Stoic. The incorporeal “place” does not appear in Seneca.

By contrast, the incorporeal “*λεκτόν*” is the object of two important treatments, both related to a moral problem. The first one appears in the *De beneficiis*, in connection with the question of whether a benefit can be withdrawn:

Benef. 6.2.1f.: An beneficium eripi posset quaesitum est. Quidam negant posse; non enim res est, sed actio. [...] Aliud est beneficium ipsum, aliud quod ad unumquemque nostrum beneficio pervenit. Illud incorporale est, inritum non fit; materia vero eius huc et illuc iactatur et dominum mutat. [...] Ipsa rerum natura revocare, quod dedit, non potest. Beneficia sua interrupt, non rescindit.

The question has been posed, whether a benefit can be withdrawn. Some deny this to be possible, since a benefit is not a thing, but an action. [...] The benefit itself and what each one of us receives through the benefit are different things. The former is incorporeal, and cannot be nullified; it is the material object received through the benefit that can be tossed here and there and change owner. [...] Nature itself cannot repeal the fact of having bestowed a gift.³⁹ It may cut off its benefits, not repeal them.

and at *nat.* 7.25.2 the expression *incorporealem potestatem* defines godhead. But in Stoicism both reason and God are corporeal.

³⁶ SVF II 331. For the evolution of the list of the incorporeals, cf. Bréhier 1970⁴, Isnardi Parente 2005. On the Stoic incorporeals, see, besides these two works, Rist 1969: 273–288; Pasquino 1978; Long and Sedley 1987: chap. 33, 49, 51; Brunschwig 1988; Duhot 1989: 87–100; Viparelli 2000: 14–22; Muller 2006: 68–71, Wildberger 2006: I: 91–201.

³⁷ SVF II 863–871: vision is explained by the contact established between the eye and the object through a cone of tense air; and, according to Sen. *epist.* 106.8: *tangere enim et tangi nisi corpus nulla potest res*; 117.7: *quod tangit corpus est*.

³⁸ Sen. *epist.* 58.22: *sextum genus eorum quae quasi sunt, tamquam inane, tamquam tempus*.

³⁹ I translate *quod dedit* as “the fact of having bestowed,” not “what has been bestowed”: this latter interpretation would run counter to Seneca’s argument.

Seneca is borrowing somebody else's argument (*quidam negant*), but he makes it his own, as shown by the fact that he adopts, and diffusely comments upon, its conclusion, namely, that benefits cannot be taken back (*benef.* 6.2.3 f.). We cannot determine the Stoic authors of this argumentation, but we do know the theorem whose application it is. What is incorporeal? The *actio*, says Seneca, "action": this should be taken to refer to the fact of bestowing, to the abstract relationship established through language between the benefactor and the object bestowed. Whereas the object of the benefit is a *res*, a body, the benefit relationship, isolated and made abstract by way of language, and considered as such in and of itself, falls within the sphere of the *λεκτά*, or logic incorporeals. But although he uses the technical term *incorporale*, Seneca does not endeavor, as we have just done, to clarify the nature of this incorporeal or the ontological status of the benefit relationship. The word *incorporale* is only used in order to support his contention that a benefit cannot be withdrawn, inasmuch as it is not identical with the material object related, *materia eius*. The *materia* (the object bestowed) can change hands or be changed itself; an incorporeal, by contrast, is not exposed to modifications affecting bodies, inasmuch as it is *not* a body. The roundabout path through which Seneca strives to prove his point by way of the concept of "incorporeal" is only aimed at rescuing the *actio* of benefit from the scope of materiality.

Epistle 117, by contrast, tells us more. The question is: is "being a wise man," *sapere*, a good? Seneca expounds the Stoic answer:

Epist. 117.2 f.: *Placet nostris quod bonum est, corpus esse. [...] Sapientiam bonum esse dicunt: sequitur ut necesse sit illam corporalem quoque dicere. At sapere non putant eiusdem condicionis esse. Incorporale est et accidens alteri, id est sapientiae.*

The philosophers of our school believe what is good to be a body. [...] They say that "wisdom" is a good: it follows that it is corporeal. But they do not believe "being wise" to have the same status. This is an incorporeal and an accident of another being, namely "wisdom."

The reasoning is the same as at *benef.* 6.2, quoted *supra*: Epistle 117 distinguishes the "wise man" and "wisdom"—which are bodies—on the one hand, and the relationship uniting them, "being wise"—which is an incorporeal—on the other. But here Seneca adds a further point, missing at *benef.* 6.2: the incorporeal *sapere* is an "accident" (*accidens*) affecting "wisdom" (this term, *accidens*, as we shall see below, refers to the logical function of the verb, which the Stoics consider to be a predicate).⁴⁰ It follows, Seneca goes on at § 4, that

⁴⁰ *Accidens* is the translation of the Greek *συμβεβηχός*, which the Stoic texts associate with

the Stoics are forced to declare, *velint nolint*, that although happiness is a good, living happily is not. Living happily cannot therefore fall within the class of desirables: it is not an *expetendum* (translation of αἰρετόν), but only an *expetibile* (translation of αἰρετέον), which is not sought as a good in itself, but merely adds itself to the good sought after.⁴¹ Several Stoic testimonies coincide in informing us that these αἰρετέα are incorporeal predicates (ἄσώματα καὶ κατηγορήματα), like, for instance, “acting prudently” (τὸ φρονεῖν) and “acting moderately” (τὸ σωφρονεῖν)—and, we could add, “being wise,” the *sapere* of Epistle 117. Summing up, “being wise” is an incorporeal because it is a predicate, that is to say, a λεκτόν.

This is even clearer further along in the Epistle, where Seneca again quotes the *Stoici*. Just as there is a difference, he says, between a field and owning a field, so there is a difference between *sapientia* and *sapere*. *Sapere* is “what happens to the person possessing wisdom”:⁴² we recognize the notion of *accidens*, which has been mentioned above. “Being wise” is included in the “movements of the soul that state something about bodies.”⁴³ These movements of the soul are not bodies: so, when I say “Cato walks,” I do speak about a body, but what I say, *quod nunc loquor*, is not a body, but “a declarative element concerning the body, which some call a proposition, others an enunciation, others a saying.”⁴⁴ What is thus defined in the most explicit way is surely the incorporeal that goes by the name of λεκτόν. This is confirmed by the very example chosen by Seneca, “Cato walks,” a mere Roman version of the canonical Greek example: “Dio walks” or “Socrates walks.”⁴⁵

But the incorporeal nature of the λεκτόν *sapere* entails a serious drawback, namely, an ontological and moral devaluation, in that—as we have seen—it forces the Stoics to state that *beate vivere* is not a good, and that *sapere* is not

κατηγορήμα, predicate: cf. Posidonius F 95 K. (Stob. *ecl.* 1.13.1C). The Stoic κατηγορήμα is a verb: in the canonical example “Socrates walks,” the predicate is “walks”; here, in Epistle 117, *sapere*, therefore, admits of functioning as a predicate. And this predicate is an incorporeal because of its very linguistic nature. *SVF* I 448 and III Arch. 8: “Cleanthes and Archedemus give κατηγορήματα the appellative of λεκτά.” Cf. Long and Sedley 1987: chap. 33, especially the texts J and M.

⁴¹ Sen. *epist.* 117.5: [*expetibile*] *non petitur tamquam bonum, sed petito bono accedit*. Cf. *SVF* III 89 and 91: the αἰρετέα are “predicates [...] correlates of goods,” κατηγορήματα [...] παρακείμενα δ’ ἀγαθοῖς; Sen. *epist.* 117.5: *petito bono accedit*. For *expetibilis/expetendus* cf. Setaioli 1988: 297 f. nn. 1378 f.

⁴² Sen. *epist.* 117.12: *id quod contingit perfectam mentem habenti*.

⁴³ Sen. *epist.* 117.13: *motus animorum enuntiativi corporum*.

⁴⁴ Sen. *epist.* 117.13: *enuntiativum quiddam de corpore, quod alii effatum vocant, alii enuntiatum, alii dictum*.

⁴⁵ “Dio walks”: *SVF* II 204 (Diog. Laert. 7.70); “Socrates walks”: *SVF* II 205 (S. Emp. *adv. math.* 8.96).

an *expetendum* but a mere *expetibile* (*epist.* 117.4f.): a devaluation, Seneca resolutely declares, that goes against the *praesumptio omnium hominum*,⁴⁶ the consensus that sees a good both in *sapientia* and in *sapere* (*epist.* 117.6). Seneca will therefore engage in an effort to demonstrate through a whole series of dialectical arguments that *sapere* is not an incorporeal, but a body and a full-fledged good (§ 6–11 and 14–17); but this demonstration is not relevant for this chapter.⁴⁷

Let us now try to outline Seneca's personal position as far as the Stoic incorporeals are concerned. It is in fact clear that in several instances he detaches himself from the Stoic vulgate. In the first place we witness this at the strictly ontological level. If we refer to the outlines in Epistle 58, it should be remembered that Seneca includes the incorporeals in the genus of "being," the *quod est*, by the same token as the bodies—not, as in the Stoic canonical outline, in the genus of *quid*, simply the "something": this imparts an assured ontological dignity, inasmuch as they are sharply distinguished from pure "non-being," the *quaedam non sunt*, which are, as we have remarked, the νοούμενα of imagination.

There is a further, substantial estrangement from the Stoic position: incorporeals appear to be endowed with the ability to hold a moral value, which contradicts their ontological status as non-bodies. This is the case with "time":

Brev. 8.1: *Re omnium pretiosissima luditur; fallit autem illos, quia res incorporealis est, quia sub oculos non venit ideoque vilissima aestimatur, immo paene nullum eius pretium est.*

Many trifle with the most precious of all things; they [*scil.* the non-philosophers] are misled by it, because it is an incorporeal, because it does not fall under the eye, and for this reason it is valued very little, actually next to nothing.

On the one hand, as we have said, the incorporeal "time" is correctly defined as what does not fall under the eye; and it is this invisibility that causes the *stulti*, the non-philosophers, to grant no value to time. In this respect we might say that the *stulti*, paradoxically, prove to be accomplished dialecticians! We should remember, in fact, that according to orthodox Stoicism only a body can be a good.⁴⁸ Here, by contrast, Seneca calls time *res pretiosissima*, an assessment incompatible with its status as an incorporeal.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ On the subject of *consensus* and the "common opinions" (κοινὰ ἔννοια), cf. Verbecke 1993.

⁴⁷ Wildberger (2006: I 165–167) provides a detailed analysis of Seneca's demonstration and its compatibility with Stoicism.

⁴⁸ Sen. *epist.* 117.2: *placet nostris quod bonum est corpus esse.*

⁴⁹ As rightly remarked by Wildberger 2006: I 115.

We witness another dissimilarity of the same kind: in Epistle 117, as we have just seen, Seneca sharply maintains that *sapere*, contrary to what the Stoic dialecticians assert, is a good. Does he then impart a moral value to the incorporeals? Their ontological promotion as found in Epistle 58, where the incorporeals, though non-bodies, are nevertheless sharply distinguished from “non-being,” might lead us to believe so. We should not forget, however, what we read at *benef.* 6.1.2, where, by contrast, the *beneficium*’s incorporeal status imparts it unalterability through its very insubstantial nature: it is because it is an incorporeal that the beneficent action cannot be affected by anything happening after. I will draw two conclusions from this: Seneca is perfectly familiar with the status granted to incorporeals by Stoic dialectics, as shown by the technicality of his analyses; but, of this status, he retains only those aspects that suit his ethical purposes. The abstract character of the incorporeal may therefore, on the one hand, bestow a paradoxical security when benefits are at play, and, on the other, confine it to an unacceptable non-existence when it comes to “time” and “being wise.” Seneca sacrifices dialectical consistency, not because he is ignorant of, or disregards it, but because his scope and horizon are those of moral pedagogy, whose importance is far greater in his eyes.

1.5.

The *genus generale* of bodies can be divided into successive *species* down to the individual (*epist.* 58.12). But a further type of division, or rather analysis, can be applied to bodies, by way of the four “categories.”⁵⁰ These categories are not subdivisions, species by species, of a primal genus, but a catalog of the different metaphysical points of view under which a body may be considered: “Stoics present in fact a quadruple division into substrata (ὑποκείμενα), what is qualified (ποιά), what is disposed in a certain way (πῶς ἔχοντα), and what is disposed in a certain way in relation to something (πρὸς τί πῶς ἔχοντα);”⁵¹ and each being falls in turn under all four categories.⁵² In Seneca these notions appear more or less explicitly in the course of several dialectical discussions.

⁵⁰ The ancient testimonies themselves only refer to “genera,” but most modern interpreters prefer the term “category,” in order to avoid confusion with the *genera* of being (described by Seneca, as we saw, in Epistle 58).

⁵¹ *SVF* II 369, 371. Cf. Goldschmidt 1979: 13–25, Rist 1969: 152–172, Pasquino 1978, Graeser 1978, Long and Sedley 1987: chap. 28 and 29, Duhot 1991, Sonderegger 2000, Gourinat 2000: 129–136, Wildberger 2006: I: 86–91.

⁵² *Plut. not. comm.* 1083E. Duhot (1991) shows quite perspicuously that Stoic categories are not univocal, but rather establish the ontological level of a being by way of differentiating, according to the specific needs of the analysis at hand.

1.5.1. *The Substratum*

The ὑποκείμενον, or “substratum” is referred to when a being is considered in relation to the passive matter it is made of, apart from the qualities that characterize it, and make it a “qualified being.” A problem is posed by the fact that Seneca gives no indication of adopting a specific Latin translation for the term ὑποκείμενον, so that when he uses words like *substantia* or *materia*, there is no way to determine whether his analysis is moving at the metaphysical level of the ὑποκείμενον or at the physical one of the οὐσία/ὕλη. In Epistle 113, however, the term “substance,” *substantia*, possibly refers to the ὑποκείμενον.⁵³ The context is indeed about categories, as we shall presently see.

1.5.2. *What Is Qualified*

According to a convincing hypothesis, the doctrine of categories was devised by Chrysippus in order to account for the ontological permanence of the individual through the changes affecting him, in the face of the Academics’ position on the issue;⁵⁴ Chrysippus allegedly replied by introducing a difference between substance and the qualified being. Epistle 113, which investigates the notions of individual and identity, appears to echo this set of problems:

Epist. 113.11: Omne animal donec moriatur id est quod coepit: homo donec moriatur homo est, equus equus, canis canis; transire in aliud non potest.

All animate beings remain what they were from the beginning to the moment they die: a man is a man until he dies, a horse a horse, a dog a dog; they cannot change into something else.

We must assume that the Stoic analysis of the second category, the one referring to the “qualified individual” (ποιόν) lies behind this text. The idea that a being, as long as it exists, does not turn into something else rests upon the notion of “individual form” (ἄτομωθὲν εἶδος), which matter receives from the active and divine principle pervading it. This form persists through all the changes affecting the substance—and only the substance—of the living being as long as it exists; it is what guarantees that the individual will hold fast and endure.⁵⁵

⁵³ Sen. *epist.* 113.4: *singula animalia singulas habere debent substantias*. Cf. also *nat.* 1.6.4 and 1.15.6.

⁵⁴ Sedley 1989. Seneca repeatedly emphasizes the changes the human being goes through at the different ages and stages of his life—which, however, do not affect its ontological persistence: cf. *epist.* 58.22 f. (quoting Heraclitus’s image of the river), 104.12, 118.14, 121.16.

⁵⁵ *SVF* II 395: “if it is true that there is, even in composite beings, the individual form (τὸ ἄτομωθὲν εἶδος) in relation to which, according to the Stoic philosophers, it can be said that

Seneca then tackles the correlated question of discernableness. Each individual is endowed with an irreducible originality:

Epist. 113.15 f.: *Nullum interim animal alteri par est. Circumspice omnium corpora: nulli non et color proprius est et figura sua et magnitudo. [...] Quae similia videntur, cum contuleris, diversa sunt.*

No two animate beings are alike. Inspect the body of each one: everyone has its own color, shape, and size. [...] Things which appear to be alike, when you compare them, result to be different.⁵⁶

The doctrinal background is disclosed by Plutarch, between the lines of a polemic he conducts against the Academics: “(the Stoics) loudly proclaim that (the Academics) confuse everything when they assert the impossibility of distinguishing things one from the other, by forcing one and the same quality (ἕνα ποιόν) to be in two different substances (ἐπὶ δυοῖν οὐσιῶν).”⁵⁷ Forcing one quality to be in two substances amounts to jeopardizing the notion of “individual form,” which, as we have seen, is the hallmark of the individual. Seneca, however, does not engage in the discussion of these notions, and is content with referring to the differences between individuals as self-understood. This does not necessarily imply avoidance of technicalities: some of the reported arguments in support of discernability are indeed quite empirical.⁵⁸

1.5.3. *What Is Disposed in a Certain Way*

The third category describes the actual state of a being.⁵⁹ Being disposed in a certain way refers to an individual who finds himself in a particular state, while his constituent elements remain unchanged: so, the fist is the hand disposed in a certain way.⁶⁰ In Epistle 113 Seneca presents several occurrences of the *quodam modo se habens* (translation of πῶς ἔχον). The question addressed is: are virtues animate beings? Seneca reports the opinion of the *nostri*, also referred to as *antiqui* (*epist.* 113.1). This surely refers to the old Stoics, probably Chrysippus.

Epist. 113.2: *Animum constat animal esse. [...] Virtus autem nihil aliud est quam animus quodam modo se habens; ergo animal est.*

something is individually qualified (καθ' ὃ ἰδίως λέγεται ποιόν). This form, besides, arises and disappears all at one time, and remains the same throughout the whole life of the composite being, even if its several parts are born and die at different moments.”

⁵⁶ Cf. *SVF* II 113.

⁵⁷ Plut. *not. comm.* 36, 1077C = *SVF* II 112, 396.

⁵⁸ So Cic. *ac. pr.* 2.56–58 resorts to the examples of twins and eggs.

⁵⁹ *SVF* II 369, 390, 400.

⁶⁰ S. Emp. *Pyrrh.* 2.81.

It is certain that the soul is an animate being. [...] Now, virtue is nothing but the soul disposed in a certain way; therefore it is an animate being.

Later in the letter similar statements are made about justice, then about courage.⁶¹ Seneca is following Stoic definitions, as confirmed by Sextus Epiricus, according to whom virtue is the guiding part of the soul, the ἡγεμονικόν, “in a certain disposition,” or “disposed in a certain way.”⁶²

The *Stoici* quoted by Seneca avail themselves of this statement in order to assert that virtues are animate beings, and that therefore there are a number of animals within us—which Seneca rejects, because for him an animate being is an individual and there cannot be several individuals in relation to one *substantia*, a term that probably corresponds to ὑποκείμενον (*epist.* 113.4). Later, Seneca quotes a further Stoic statement, this time supporting his point:

Epist. 113.24: *Idem est animus et animus et iustus et prudens et fortis, ad singulas virtutes quodammodo se habens.*

The soul, and the just, provident, and courageous soul, disposed in a certain way in relation to each individual virtue, are one and the same thing.⁶³

Resorting to the third category, then, allows us to account for the multiplicity of virtues without creating a number of new animate beings, i.e., new individuals. Virtue, inasmuch as it is *animus quodammodo se habens*, is a particular state of the soul, i.e., of a being, which is itself an individualized body and a qualified entity, a ποιόν. The analysis of virtue through the concept of *quodammodo se habens* attributes modifications to the soul without affecting its individuality and uniqueness. As for the expression *ad singulas virtutes*, it puts us on the track of the fourth category, which we shall now investigate.

1.5.4. *What Is Disposed in a Certain Way in Relation to Something*

The Stoics describe in the following way the outward differentiating characteristics that pertain to a connection with other bodies and can cease without affecting the body concerned: “Beings disposed in a certain way in relation to something are like a man on the right, a father, and the like. [...] What is disposed in a certain way in relation to something [...] is dependent on a relation to something else.”⁶⁴ Whoever is disposed in a certain way in relation to something (or somebody) will no longer be on the right, if his neighbor

⁶¹ Sen. *epist.* 113.7 and 11.

⁶² *SVF* III 75 = S. Emp. *adv. math.* 11.22.

⁶³ For the problem of the uniqueness and multiplicity of virtues, with Ariston's and Chrysippus's positions on the subject, cf. Long and Sedley 1987: chap. 61.

⁶⁴ *SVF* II 403.

changes his position, will no longer be a father if his son dies, but his own mode of being will not be affected.

This idea appears in Epistle 121. Seneca has asked himself “whether all animate beings have a notion of their own constitution. We gather that they do, primarily from the fact that they move their limbs in an easy and suitable fashion [...]”.⁶⁵ *Constitutio* corresponds to Chrysippus’s notion of σύστασις,⁶⁶ and the only definition that we have of this notion is Seneca’s own:

Epist. 121.10: *Constitutio est principale animi quodammodo se habens erga corpus.*

The *constitutio* is the guiding part of the soul disposed in a certain way in relation to the body.

The *principale animi*, the hegemonic part of the soul, then, is characterized in its outward relation to another entity, the body. Seneca’s fictive interlocutor mocks with some justification the subtlety of this definition.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the advantage Seneca expects to draw from it is once more related to his aim to reconcile the permanence of the individual with the changes affecting his or her person. If we take the same individual at different ages, clearly, the baby, the child, the young man, and the old man will present considerable differences. How does the individual recognize himself, how is he aware of the permanence of his self all through these different stages? The fact is that the relations entertained by his ἡγεμονικόν with the changing elements of his physical person follow the fashion proper to relative beings. They may change without intrinsically affecting the ἡγεμονικόν, that is the self, or, at a later stage, the individual’s natural adaptation to itself, the *conciliatio*.⁶⁸

2. EPISTEMOLOGY

Seneca believes it possible to attain an apprehension, *scientia*, and a complete knowledge of all the beings defined by ontology. This knowledge is wisdom, *sapientia*, the one study that can veritably be called “liberal,” that is worthy of

⁶⁵ Sen. *epist.* 121.5: [...] *an esset omnibus animalibus constitutionis suae sensus. Esse autem ex eo maxime apparet quod membra apte et expedite movent.* At the beginning of the letter Seneca has disclosed that he is following Posidonius and Archdemus of Tarsus.

⁶⁶ SVF III 178: “according to Chrysippus in the first book of “On Ends” the first characteristic distinctly pertaining to every living being is its own constitution and its awareness of it (τὴν αὐτοῦ σύστασιν καὶ τὴν ταύτης συνείδησιν).”

⁶⁷ Sen. *epist.* 121.10: *hoc tam perplexum et subtile et vobis quoque vix enarrabile [...].*

⁶⁸ Sen. *epist.* 121.15 f.: *unicuique aetati sua constitutio est, alia infanti, alia puero, alia seni: omnes ei constitutioni conciliantur in qua sunt. [...] non enim puerum mihi aut iuvenem aut senem, sed me natura commendat.*

the free man.⁶⁹ The modes of this *scientia* are methodically analyzed in Epistle 89. Wisdom is defined as the “science of things divine and human,” *divinorum et humanorum scientiam*.⁷⁰ Seneca mentions a further definition, the science of causes,⁷¹ but considers it superfluous, because, he says, causes are part of divine things. But how does one attain the complete knowledge that is wisdom? Through philosophy, considered—in accordance with etymology—as “love and taste for wisdom”:⁷² a definition that Seneca appears to take as his own, that, at any rate, he does not attribute to anybody else. By contrast, he attributes to different sources other definitions he quotes shortly after, which lay more stress on the ethical aspect, but do not seem to retain his attention.⁷³

Philosophy, in turn, presents a marked unity, of a biological type, expressed through metaphors loaded with meaning. The *philosophia* is an “immense body,” in the likeness of the cosmos itself⁷⁴ (of which, as is well-known, the Stoics have a vitalist conception): an idea implying a dynamic unity and the interpenetration of the several parts, which entails the requirement to study philosophy not in linear sequence, but by the simultaneous exercise of its parts.⁷⁵ In practice, however, subdivision cannot be helped, inasmuch as the human mind does not possess the ability to grasp it globally. But Seneca resolutely maintains⁷⁶ that this stems from a merely practical need, not from any objective reality. Answering a question posed by Lucilius, he will then expound the divisions of philosophy, but will avoid crumbling it excessively—which would be not merely useless, it would impair our understanding of it.⁷⁷ This rejection of excessive partition amounts to an implied criticism of certain exaggerated subdivisions current in Stoicism; Cleanthes, for example, distinguished six parts of philosophy.⁷⁸

⁶⁹ Sen. *epist.* 88.2. Cf. Stückelberger 1965, and, for the relation to Posidonius, Setaioli 1988: 316–322.

⁷⁰ Sen. *epist.* 89.5; also 31.8, 68.2, 74.29, 88.33, 88.35, 90.3, 104.22, 110.8. It is a Stoic traditional definition: *SVF* II 35, 36.

⁷¹ Sen. *epist.* 89.5: *sapientia est nosse divina et humana et horum causas*. Cf. Cic. *off.* 2.5, *Tusc.* 4.57, 5.7. Cf. Zechel 1966: 41 f. Possibly this definition goes back to Posidonius: cf. *epist.* 95.65, and the parallel with Philo, *de congr.* 79.

⁷² Sen. *epist.* 89.4: *sapientiae amor et affectatio*.

⁷³ Sen. *epist.* 89.5: *alii studium illam [scil. philosophiam] virtutis esse dixerunt, alii studium corrigendae mentis; a quibusdam dicta est adpetitio rectae rationis*. Cf. Zechel 1966: 43 f.

⁷⁴ Sen. *epist.* 89.1: *ingens corpus*. The image comes from old Stoicism: *SVF* II 38.

⁷⁵ *SVF* II 41. Cf. Hadot 1991.

⁷⁶ Sen. *epist.* 89.1 f.

⁷⁷ Sen. *epist.* 89.2 f.

⁷⁸ *SVF* I 482.

Epist. 89.9: *Philosophiae tres partes esse dixerunt et maximi et plurimi auctores: moralem, naturalem, rationalem.*

According to the most authoritative and numerous sources, philosophy comprises three parts: ethics, physics, logic.⁷⁹

This division is well attested in Stoic sources, which attribute it to Zeno but also point out that it predates Stoicism.⁸⁰ Even though there is no chronological or hierarchical relation among the parts of philosophy, the order in which Seneca lists them here has few parallels⁸¹ and leads us to surmise that a hierarchical arrangement in decreasing order of dignity may be intended: at the end of *Epistle* 89 Seneca advises, in fact, referring everything to ethics, and in *Epistle* 88 he characterizes philosophy by the fact that, unlike the liberal arts, it teaches virtue.⁸² On the other hand, we know that Seneca has a high appreciation of physics, and that, by contrast, he often criticizes the abuse of dialectics, i.e., logic. However, in *Epistle* 88.24, although this is a passage that—it must not be forgotten—is influenced by Posidonius, the order is physics, ethics, logic. Finally, at *nat.* 1 *pr.* 1, philosophy is denoted through two parts only, “the one concerning man and the one concerning the gods,” that is ethics and physics,⁸³ the latter being conceived of as a theology: the fact is that Seneca does not take into account philosophy as a whole, but is content with comparing two of its parts, surely against the background of the definition of wisdom as the science of things divine and human. Ethics in turn admits of some divisions:

Epist. 89.14: [*Moralem partem*] *in tria rursus dividi placuit, ut prima esset inspectio suum cuique distribuens et aestimans quanto quidque dignum sit [...] secunda de impetu, de actionibus tertia.*

It seemed convenient to divide ethics into three parts, the first concerned with evaluating and meting out what is due to each one as well as tax-

⁷⁹ Cf. also Sen. *epist.* 88.24, *nat.* 1 *pr.* 1 (physics and ethics only).

⁸⁰ *SVF* II 35–38. Cic. *fin.* 4.4. For Stoic divisions of philosophy, cf. Pohlenz 1970: 32–36, Zechel 1966, Verbeke 1973, Hadot 1991, Muller 2006: 51–60, Wildberger 2006: I 133–137, II: 365–368. Zechel and Wildberger point out the marked similarity between Seneca and S. Emp. *adv. math.* 7.1–16, and assume the existence of a common source.

⁸¹ According to Diog. Laert. 7.41 Diogenes of Ptolemais also began with ethics. The most usual order, however, is physics, ethics, logic (*SVF* II 35, 37, 38, 39, 40); we also find logic, ethics, physics (*SVF* II 42, 44), and logic, physics, ethics (*SVF* II 43).

⁸² Sen. *epist.* 89.23: *omnia ad mores et ad sedandam rabiem adfectuum referens.*

⁸³ The context proves, however, that Seneca has logic, too, in mind. The definition, at *nat.* 1 *pr.* 2, of ethics as what *errores nostros discutit et lumen admovet quo discernantur ambigua vitae* shows that Seneca envisages resorting to dialectics in order to tackle moral problems. Dialectics is in fact defined in *Epistle* 90.29 as the tool enabling us to establish truth and dispel “the ambiguities of life and language.” Cf. below.

ing the value of everything, [...] the second with *impetus*, the third with actions.⁸⁴

Seneca returns to this triple division three times in Epistle 89.14 f., and insists that there is no veritable moral life if any of these cognitions is missing. The order, then, is merely descriptive, with no hierarchical dignity or pedagogical chronology involved.

Physics poses a more intricate problem. Its domain is divided into *corporalia* and *incorporalia*—which is tantamount to saying that it covers the area of the *quod est*—and each of these two parts, in turn, entails “degrees,” *gradus*.⁸⁵ In fact, only the “degrees” of bodies are treated. The “domain of bodies,” *corporum locus*, is in turn divided into “things that act,” *ea quae faciunt* (i.e., the principles) and “things begotten from these,” *quae ex his gignuntur* (i.e., the elements). According to some authors, Seneca adds, the domain of the *elementa* is partitioned *in materiam et causam omnia moventem et elementa*, “into matter and cause imparting movement to all, and elements.” *Materia* and *causa* can be easily identified with the two principles—active and passive—which give rise to bodies. But what shall we make of *elementa*, which appears in turn as a genus and as a species of its own genus? In my opinion, what Seneca means is that the *elementa* can be scrutinized both from a metaphysical point of view, as resulting from the action of the supreme cause upon matter, and in and by themselves.⁸⁶ On the other hand, in Epistle 90.28 f. we find a different partition of the domain of physics: theology (gods and daemons) comes first, then the *initia rerum*, i.e., the principles (*aeternamque rationem toti inditam et vim omnium seminum singula proprie figurantem*), and finally the soul.

Last comes logic, which, in accordance with its etymology, is placed in relation with *oratio*, speech:

Epist. 89.18: *Superest ut rationalem partem philosophiae dividamus. Omnis oratio aut continua est aut inter respondentem et interrogantem discissa. Hanc διαλεκτικήν, illam ῥητορικὴν placuit vocari.*

⁸⁴ The same division, in a different order, appears in Diog. Laert. 7.84 (*SVF* III 1).

⁸⁵ Sen. *epist.* 89.16. For the *quod est*, cf. *epist.* 58.11 and 14.

⁸⁶ One might be tempted to equate this division with the generic division in Diog. Laert. 7.132, which distinguishes the domains concerned with the cosmos, the elements, and etiology. This, however, is hardly possible: Diogenes's partition applies to physics as a whole, not to the elements alone; besides, it is difficult to liken Seneca's *materia* to the cosmos; finally, the *causa omnia movere*[s] is the supreme cause, not the study of the specific causes making up etiology, as it is in Diogenes.

It remains for us to divide the rational part of philosophy. All speech is either uninterrupted or divided into answers and questions. It was decided to call the former rhetoric, the latter dialectics.

This division into rhetoric as uninterrupted speech and dialectics as an exchange of questions and answers, which is well-known from other sources,⁸⁷ indicates that the distinction between rhetoric and dialectics is merely formal, the choice between the two being undoubtedly linked with practical conditions, inasmuch as rhetoric was in order in some situations and dialectics in other. This also entails rhetoric's full pertinence to philosophy and, because of this, its status as a science. This conclusion, not drawn here by Seneca, appears in the Stoic sources: rhetoric is an ἐπιστήμη τοῦ λέγειν, which, just like dialectics, supplies truth.⁸⁸

Epist. 89.17: 'Ρητορικὴ *verba curat et sensus et ordinem*; διαλεκτικὴ *in duas partes dividitur; in verba et significationes, id est in res quae dicuntur et vocabula quibus dicuntur.*

Rhetoric is concerned with words, sentences, and planning the discourse; dialectics is divided into two parts, words and meanings, that is, what is being said and the words by which it is said.

Sensus, in my opinion, means "sentence" in this passage: in this way Seneca's list opens with the simple element, the word, and proceeding in order of growing complexity, closes with the organization of the speech itself, *ordo* being synonymous with *dispositio*.⁸⁹ As far as the definition of dialectics is concerned, it coincides with Diogenes Laertius's testimony at 7.62: "(Dialectics) is concerned, as Chrysippus says, with signifiers (σημαίνοντα) and signifieds (σημαινόμενα)." Starting out from this, there are numerous subdivisions, into which Seneca refuses to go, since, he says, they would require a whole volume.⁹⁰ Another definition appears in Epistle 90:

Epist. 90.29: [*Sapientia*] *deinde a corporalibus se ad incorporalia transtulit veritatemque et argumenta eius excussit, post haec quemadmodum discernerentur vitae aut vocis ambigua; in utraque enim falsa veris inmixta sunt.*

⁸⁷ Diog. Laert. 7.41 f., S. Emp. *adv. math.* 2.6 f.

⁸⁸ Cf. *SVF* II 292–294.

⁸⁹ I do not believe, contrary to Wildberger 2006: I: 139 (and in spite of Diog. Laert. 7.43: "there is also a division of rhetoric into invention, elocution, disposition, and performance"), that in this passage Seneca refers to *elocutio*, *inventio*, and *dispositio*: he would hardly mention *elocutio* before *inventio*.

⁹⁰ A sample of these subdivisions appears in Diog. Laert. 7.43–45. Cf. Gourinat 2000: Part I: 19–107: "La notion de dialectique," Hamacher 2006: 16–18.

Then (wisdom) moved from corporeals to incorporeals and scrutinized truth and its foundations, after that how the ambiguities of life and language could be disentangled, for in either one the false is mixed with the true.

Dialectics, here, is connected with the notion of incorporeal,⁹¹ which is understandable inasmuch as it is concerned with the λεκτά, which are incorporeals. But the notion of ambiguity, which is also present, opens the way to a possible perversion of dialectics, when it falls into mean hands. A shrewd dialectician will then be able, by playing upon words, to muddle reality and distort morals, or simply take pleasure in intellectual subtleties that make us lose sight of the fundamentals,⁹² that is, the life choices induced by science and wisdom.

Ontology and epistemology, as defined and studied here, can teach us something, beyond their specific domain, about Seneca's philosophic attitude. Both evidence the solidity of his Stoic background. On the subject of ontology, founded for a considerable part on dialectics and its subtleties, Seneca displays undoubted competence. Although he does not expressly disclose the provenance of the notions he is handling, being content, most of the time, with hinting at the authors by a *quidam* or a *nostri*, it is not unduly difficult for us to determine their old or middle Stoic origin; he has no qualms, nonetheless, if he finds it useful for his parenetic intent, about wandering away from strictly Stoic definitions, as we have seen him doing in his treatment of incorporeals. Be that as it may, ontological notions are rarely investigated for their own sake; they are subordinate to other inquiries, or at most drawn forth as a reply to a specific question by Lucilius. By contrast, the question of the nature and the domain of knowledge is the object of a specific and comprehensive treatment, Epistle 89, which is partly complemented in outlying but adjacent texts: Epistles 88 and 90. Unlike ontology, then, this appears to Seneca to be a question worthy of full elucidation and an independent, if succinct, treatment—which seems very significant to me. What really matters, to Seneca, are not scholarly subtleties, not even Stoic ones. The true philosopher should never forget that the knowledge he seeks is one *corpus*, *ingens* though it be, and that its end is wisdom.

⁹¹ This definition is close to Posidonius's *ap. Diog. Laert.* 7.62 (= F 188 K.): "dialectics is the science of the true, the false, and what is neither."

⁹² Sen. *epist.* 48.4f.: *tu mihi verba distorques et syllabas digeris. Scilicet nisi interrogationes vaferrimas struxero et conclusione falsa a vero nascens mendacium adstrinxero, non potero a fugiendis petenda secernere.* For dialectics as worthless play, cf., among others, *epist.* 45.5, 82.8–24 (cf. Hamacher 2006), 106.11, 108.23, 111.4, 113.26 f., 117.19.

ETHICS I:
PHILOSOPHY AS THERAPY,
SELF-TRANSFORMATION, AND “LEBENSFORM”*

Aldo Setaioli

1.

During the Hellenistic period an aspect of philosophy that was by no means new in Greek thought, namely the function of spiritual direction and therapy of the soul,¹ became more clearly marked, as primacy was gradually awarded to ethics. This trend was obviously bound to find a favorable reception at Rome, where its most consistent expression is to be encountered precisely in Seneca's work. A. Guillemin's felicitous definition, “Sénèque directeur d'âmes,”² is accepted today by nearly all scholars. His writings are tools of education³ and aim at the moral improvement of his own self as much as of his addressees, in order to attain happiness (*vita beata*). It must in fact be stressed from the very outset that Seneca considers himself to be in need of (self-)improvement no less than the people he addresses in his writings.⁴ It is in the unfaltering faithfulness to this ethical goal that his real consistency must be recognized, notwithstanding whatever doctrinal discrepancies may be detected in his work.⁵ We shall see that the latter are often made subservient to the ethical goal and in this way reabsorbed into our philosopher's basically Stoic view.

The first step of this therapeutic process must, of course, be negative. In Seneca's view the therapist must first remove the attitudes that hinder his “healing” action and make it impossible to free souls from the “disease”

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¹ Cf. Nussbaum 1994, a stimulating, if somewhat unhistoric book; also Voelke 1993.

² Guillemin 1952, Guillemin 1953, Guillemin 1954.

³ Cf. von Albrecht 2004: 2: “Instrument philosophischer Erziehung und Selbsterziehung.” Von Albrecht is referring to the *Epistulae morales*, but the remark can be extended to the whole of Seneca's philosophic work. The title of von Albrecht's book felicitously summarizes this aspect of Seneca's writing: the quest for transformation (and self-transformation) to be achieved by (mainly) verbal tools and leading to the good way of living.

⁴ Cf. *epist.* 8.2, 57.3, 75.15 f., *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).17.3 f., etc.

⁵ Cf., e.g., Setaioli 2000: 150 n. 205.

that affects them. Only after “conversion” can the positive improvements envisaged by Seneca’s program be expected.

The medical metaphor is widespread in ancient philosophy⁶ and in Seneca it is absolutely pervasive.⁷ Mireille Armisen-Marchetti counts up to 248 references, between metaphors and similes, equating philosophy to medicine.⁸ So, the philosopher is primarily seen as a doctor of souls⁹ and the diseases that must be healed are passions (Greek *pathē*). Cicero prefers rendering *pathos* with *perturbatio* rather than with *morbis*, although he feels this to be more literal;¹⁰ but he does employ the medical term *aegritudo*.¹¹ Seneca distinguishes between *adfectus* and *morbis*,¹² and although he employs the former in the sense of Greek *pathos*, he very often resorts to the image of disease in order to describe the condition of the soul fallen prey to passions.¹³

According to the Stoics, passion originates from a wrong judgment,¹⁴ but it is not a merely theoretical mistake; in as much as it is a *hormē pleonazousa* it is strongly dynamic, it is a violent impulse insensitive to reason.¹⁵ Seneca fully accepts this conception.¹⁶ Two important consequences follow: 1) the first stage of the therapy will not be able to resort to completely rational arguments, which would have no effect on souls fallen prey to passion;¹⁷ and 2) in this stage the “doctor of souls” will be obliged to resort to an aggressive approach, if he expects his therapy, directed at those who are under the sway of the violence of passion, to be effective.¹⁸ Seneca’s “doctor” must be

⁶ Cf., e.g., Nussbaum 1994: 6 and *passim*.

⁷ Cf. Steyns 1906: 51–70; Smith 1910: 39–46; Armisen-Marchetti 1989: 132–138, 317; Ficca 2001: 165–169.

⁸ Armisen-Marchetti 1989: 347.

⁹ The same applies to Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, although each moves in his own way. Cf. Cooper 2006: 45.

¹⁰ Cic. *Tusc.* 3.7: *ego poteram “morbos,” et id verbum esset e verbo, sed in consuetudinem nostram non caderet*; 4.10: *quae Graeci πᾶσι vocant, nobis perturbationes appellari magis placet quam morbos*; *fin.* 3.35: *perturbationes animorum [...] quas Graeci pathē appellant—poteram ego verbum ipsum interpretans “morbos” appellare, sed non conveni et ad omnia.*

¹¹ E.g., Cic. *Tusc.* 3.23.

¹² *Epist.* 75.11, 83.10. See Pittet 1937: 75.

¹³ Cf. Borgo 1998: 13–16 (*adfectus*), 19 f. (*aegritudo*), 20–22 (*aeger*), 22 f. (*aegroto*), 134–136 (*morbis*).

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., *SVF* I 202, 207, III 384, 456, 459, 461.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., *SVF* I 205, III 377, 378, 385, 412, 462, 479. For passion as something *apeithes logōi*, cf. also *SVF* III 389, 394, 476.

¹⁶ E.g., *epist.* 85.6: *si das aliquos adfectus sapienti, impar illis erit ratio et velut torrente quodam auferetur*; 85.8: *quantuscumque est [scil. adfectus], parere nescit, consilium non accipit*. For this aspect see Wacht 1998: 515 f., 521 f.

¹⁷ Cf. esp. *SVF* III 389.

¹⁸ Cf. Husner 1924: 8 f.

ready to cut and burn, not restrict himself to bland cures;¹⁹ and his approach is linguistically matched by the other metaphor Seneca often employs in connection with his educational activity: the one referring to a "war," or at any rate "fight," against the passions.²⁰ Not rarely the medical and the military images merge, especially in the "Consolations,"²¹ i.e., in the works belonging to a genre institutionally devoted to healing a wound of the soul.²² We shall briefly investigate them before addressing the more personal sides of Seneca's therapeutic program.

2.

From our point of view the central problem posed by the consolatory genre lies in establishing the relationship between the two elements that converge in this type of writing: the literary and rhetorical aspect on the one hand, the philosophical on the other. The predominance of the former has been upheld by Kassel, whereas the opposite point of view has been defended by Johann.²³ Although Posidonius included the *consolatio* in philosophical discourse, as reported by Seneca himself,²⁴ there is no doubt that rhetoric plays a decisive role in this genre, as confirmed by the space allotted to it in rhetorical handbooks.²⁵ Seneca's thought may be "naturally consolatory,"²⁶ but this does not imply that in his "Consolations" the rhetorical and literary element does not retain a crucial importance. In the *consolatio* addressed to his mother the purely literary *aemulatio* of the Ciceronian model is obvious;²⁷

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., *epist.* 75.7.

²⁰ Cf. Wilson 1997: 62f., Ficca 2001: 169–180. *Vivere [...]* *militare est*, says Seneca at *epist.* 96.5. See also Steyns 1906: 5–50, Smith 1910: 127–135, Armisen-Marchetti 1989: 94–97, Cervellera 1990.

²¹ Cf. Ficca 2001: 180–182.

²² Cf. Wilson 1997: 48: "the consolation is perhaps the paradigmatic instance in the therapeutic mode of philosophising."

²³ Kassel 1958, Johann 1968. I have expressed my opinion and discussed the copious literature in a series of papers: Setaioli 1997a (now collected and updated in Setaioli 2000: 275–323, 411), Setaioli 1999, Setaioli 2001a, Setaioli 2001b, Setaioli 2005a, Setaioli 2007c.

²⁴ *Epist.* 95.65. Cf. Setaioli 1988: 336–349.

²⁵ Cf. Ps. Dion. Hal. *rhet.* 6.4–6 (II, p. 281,1–283,19 U.–R.: within the treatment of the *logos epitaphios*); Menand. *Rhet.* III, p. 413,15–414,30 Sp.; cf. III, p. 421,14–422,4.

²⁶ So Ficca 2001: 9: "Seneca, il cui pensiero è [...] *naturaliter* consolatorio."

²⁷ *Dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).1.2: *praeterea, cum omnia clarissimorum ingeniorum monimenta ad compescendos moderandosque luctus evolverem, non inveniebam exemplum eius qui consolatus suos esset cum ipse ab illis comploraretur*. This passage closely recalls Cic. *Att.* 12.14.3: *nihil enim de dolore minuendo scriptum ab ullo est quod ego non domi tuae legerim [...]* *quin etiam feci, quod profecto ante me nemo, ut ipse me per litteras consolaret [...]* *adfirmit tibi nullam consolationem*

and in Epistle 99, a *consolatio* addressed to Marullus for the loss of a baby son, Seneca adopts the *schēma plagion*, i.e., he purports to be scolding Marullus instead of consoling him, following the well-known rhetorical mode ostensibly pursuing a goal opposite to the one expected by the listener or the reader.²⁸ This, of course, does not prevent him from employing the very same consolatory *topoi* that are found in the other writings belonging to the genre. This very text, however, exemplifies the functional use of rhetoric so characteristic of Seneca's writing. Resorting to the *schēma plagion* is justified at the end of the letter as the necessary means to attain Seneca's real goal: not so much ephemeral and contingent consolation as the permanent strengthening of the soul in view of all possible misfortunes.²⁹ In this way the Stoic "consolation" may be put on a par with the therapy against passions that appears in the rest of Seneca's work: it aims not merely at curing a past wound, but at a lasting transformation of the soul.

There are further aspects of Seneca's "Consolations" that reappear in deeper and more developed modes in the rest of his work. In the "Consolation" addressed to his mother he is at the same time the "doctor" and the "patient," just as he always portrays himself in his writings. Another consolatory text, Epistle 63 to Lucilius, opens with the avowal that the wise man's *apatheia* cannot be expected from the common man, though this would indeed be best.³⁰ This amounts to the frank admission that here, as in all of his work, Seneca's therapeutic effort is not addressed to the *sapiens*—who does not need it; and at the end of the letter he counts himself among those who are a long way from the attainment of *apatheia*.³¹

esse talem. Cf. Cic. *Att.* 12.21.5. If Cicero is consoling *himself* for a misfortune that had befallen him rather than somebody else, Seneca surpasses him, since he is consoling *somebody else* for a misfortune by which he has been affected himself; that is why he can still boast, even after Cicero, that no "Consolation" is like the one he has written. Cf. Setaioli 2003: 63f.

²⁸ Wilson 1997 misses this rhetorical device in Epistle 99. He even thinks (p. 66) that Marullus is a fictional character. But Seneca himself stresses the literary originality of his approach (*non sum solitum morem secutus: epist.* 99.1). This consists in applying this *schēma* to the *consolatio*, where it was not common, surely not in the *schēma* in and by itself.

²⁹ *Epist.* 99.32: *haec tibi scripsi, non tanquam expectaturus esses remedium a me tam serum [...], sed ut castigarem exiguum illam moram qua a te recessisti, et in reliquum adhortarer contra fortunam tolleres animum eqs.* In the same way, the *Consolatio ad Helviam* aims not merely to console his mother for his own personal exile, but to conquer the fear of exile—one of the most dreaded misfortunes (*epist.* 85.41, 91.8).

³⁰ In practice, if not in theory, Seneca adopts Crantor's position (Crantor F 3a Mette; cf. Setaioli 1999: 147). Cf. also *epist.* 99.15.

³¹ *Epist.* 63.14–16. Seneca, who is consoling Lucilius for the death of a friend, succumbed himself to grief at the death of Serenus. It must be noted, however, that from this experience Seneca has learned the necessity of the *meditatio* (*numquam cogitaveram mori eum ante me*

"Consolations" belonged to a well-established genre, although in Seneca they acquire some of the characters of his general therapeutic strategy. The latter, however, could not dispense with a theoretical foundation concerned with the possibility of ethical progress. According to the Stoics, every person, theoretically, is able to attain wisdom (*sapientia*). Man's own nature impels him toward what is fitting for him, namely reason.³² Actually, though, this spur is hardly ever successful, due to the "perversion" worked upon man's reason through the influence of what surrounds him, things and people alike.³³

So, Seneca is convinced that each man has been equipped by nature with the tools to attain wisdom,³⁴ though very few will actually reach that goal. The Stoic wise man is not a myth: though extremely rare, he has actually appeared on earth, and will appear again.³⁵ Surely this will happen once in several centuries; therefore, in practice, much of the process of self-transformation promoted by Seneca will confine itself to a sort of second-degree ethics, which will not transcend the sphere of the *kathékonta*, as defined by Panaetius.³⁶ But Seneca never loses sight of perfect wisdom as an ideal.³⁷ What he preaches is the *sapientiae studium*, the pursuit of wisdom. Happiness can be reached only through its attainment, but just striving toward it will make life tolerable.³⁸

posse: epist. 63.14): a cornerstone of his therapeutic strategy (see below), which he amply employs in the "Consolations." Cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1986: 188 f.

³² The Stoics called this process *oikeiōsis* (*conciliatio*): cf. *SVF* I 181, 197, II 724, III 178 f., 229a, 492. Cf., e.g., Pembroke 1971. Most recently Gill 2006: 36–46. Seneca was familiar with this doctrine, which he discusses in *Epistle* 121 (cf. Setaioli 1988: 306). In this epistle he mainly dwells on the "conciliation" of living beings to their physical constitution (cf. also *epist.* 14.1, 116.3); but he also clearly envisages man's "conciliation" to reason (*epist.* 121.3; cf. 104.23). See now Bees 2004: 46–74.

³³ This is the Stoic theory of *diastrophē* (*perversio*): cf. *SVF* III 228–236. Seneca was familiar with this doctrine: cf. *epist.* 94.52–58, with the commentary of Bellincioni 1979: 194–201.

³⁴ *Epist.* 31.9: (*natura*) *dedit tibi illa quae si non deserueris, par deo surges*; 49.11: *rationem [...] imperfectam, sed quae perfici posset*; 76.10: *quid est in homine proprium? Ratio: haec recta et consummata felicitatem hominis implevit [...] si hanc perfecit laudabilis est et finem naturae suae tetigit*; 92.27: *ratio vero dis hominibusque communis est: haec in illis consummata est, in nobis consummabilis*; 92.30: *capax est noster animus, perfertur illo si vitia non deprimant*. For Seneca the possibility for man to attain wisdom is guaranteed by his divine and heavenly origin. Cf. Setaioli 2006–2007: 363 f.

³⁵ *Dial.* 2 (= *const.*) 7.1: *non fingimus istud humani ingenii vanum decus nec ingentem imaginem falsae rei concipimus, sed qualem conformamus exhibuimus, exhibebimus, raro forsitan magnisque aetatium intervallis unum*. Cf. 2.1.

³⁶ *Epist.* 42.1: *scis quem nunc virum bonum dicam? hunc secundae notae; nam ille alter fortasse tamquam phoenix semel anno quingentesimo nascitur*. For the influence of Panaetius on Seneca, cf. Setaioli 2000: 130–139, 165–168, 180–182, 187–191.

³⁷ For the importance of the figure of the *sapiens* in Seneca, see, e.g., Ganss 1952.

³⁸ *Epist.* 16.1: *liquere hoc tibi, Lucili, scio, neminem posse beate vivere sine sapientiae studio, et beatam vitam perfecta sapientia effici, ceterum tolerabilem etiam inchoata*. Cf. Hengelbrock

So, although spiritual therapy does not by definition address the *sapientes*, the ideal of perfect wisdom will constantly be in the background.

We possess no writing of Seneca's addressed to someone who has not already been "converted" and persuaded to submit to his therapy and embark on the long journey to Stoic wisdom.³⁹ Seneca does in fact maintain that it is the duty of the therapist to attempt treatment of even seemingly desperate cases before giving up;⁴⁰ but generally speaking his work addresses people who, like himself, are trying to progress toward virtue and wisdom, i.e., Panaetius's *prokoptontes*, or, as he says, *proficientes*. These may be at different levels or degrees of progress,⁴¹ but we must not think that below the *sapiens* there is only vacuum.⁴²

3.

Once the scope and purpose of Seneca's therapy has been clarified, we are ready to investigate the instruments he uses to attain his goal. These are predominantly verbal. In the first stages he resorts to the rhetoric of the *admonitio*⁴³ (which, as we saw, can be aggressive in tone), then to the technique of the *meditatio*, although the latter, as we shall see, is accompanied by practical, or partly practical, "exercises." Though in both cases people still a long way from the goal are addressed, the *meditatio*, as well as the "exercises,"

2000: 103–111. Hengelbrock, however, is wrong when he claims that Seneca is inconsistent in placing the idea of perfect wisdom side by side with his promotion of moral progress. A similar mistake is found in Rist 1989: 2012: "at times he verges on optimistic heterodoxy, for the possibility of being a sage is less remote for the practical Seneca than for his Greek masters." In reality, even Cleanthes and Chrysippus believed that virtue could be taught (*SVF* II 567, III 223).

³⁹ We shall briefly mention later the alleged Epicurean leanings of Lucilius, at least at the beginning of the correspondence (cf. below, n. 48). What is important here is the pride Seneca takes in Lucilius's moral progress under his direction (*epist.* 34.2).

⁴⁰ *Epist.* 29.3: *certum petat, eligat profecturos, ab iis quos desperavit recedat, non tamen cito relinquat et in ipsa desperatione extrema remedia temptet*. Cf. 50.6. Seneca does admit, however, that in some cases no therapy has an effect: *epist.* 94.24, 31, *clem.* 1.2.2. Cf. *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).3.3.

⁴¹ Cf. next note. At *Epistle* 25.1 Seneca says of two friends: *alterius vitia emendanda, alterius frangenda sunt*. But here he reaffirms that an effort must be made even in seemingly desperate cases: *epist.* 25.2: *nec desperaveris etiam diutinos aegros posse sanari*; 25.3: *inpendam huic rei dies et utrum possit aliquid agi an non possit experiar*. In some cases the *proficiens* may have already greatly advanced, like Serenus, the addressee of the *De tranquillitate animi*.

⁴² *Epist.* 75.8: *"quid ergo? infra illum nulli gradus sunt? statim a sapientia praeceps est?" Non, ut existimo*. Seneca goes on to establish a triple division of the *proficientes* (*epist.* 75.8–18). Cf. also *epist.* 52.3–7.

⁴³ For Seneca's *admonitio* and the theory of its style, see Setaioli 2000: 111–126, 141–155, where the main texts and the relevant bibliography are quoted and discussed.

can at least be recommended to people who have already decided to undertake their own reformation, whereas the rhetoric of admonishment—though necessary until the final stage is reached, i.e., until unemotional discourse addressing reason can be used—may also be directed to reluctant addressees who must still be “converted,” i.e., persuaded to embark on ethical improvement. The prose of Seneca’s *admonitio* will therefore resort to the resources of rhetoric and will not address the listener’s or reader’s reason, but rather play on their emotions.⁴⁴ In this connection Seneca admirably avails himself of his rhetorical background, creating his unmistakable style,⁴⁵ but we shall see that the fruitful match with his philosophical standpoint allows him to proceed well beyond contemporary school rhetoric in a surprisingly “modern” direction.

It might seem that in addressing the emotional rather than the rational sphere Seneca would run counter to his school’s positions, but this is definitely not the case. As observed above,⁴⁶ according to the Stoics, passions, although really arising from a wrong judgment, are insensitive to reason. It is therefore futile to try correcting this judgment through rational arguments. Chrysippus proceeds even further: in the therapy of urgent cases the therapist must avail himself of any “medicine” to which the patient is liable to react, even if it does not correspond to truth, i.e., if it is a tenet of a philosophical school different from Stoicism.⁴⁷ Incidentally, this is exactly what Seneca often does with Lucilius, when, somewhat surprisingly for a Stoic, he enlists Epicurus under the banner of his ethical *admonitio* (and *meditatio*).⁴⁸

⁴⁴ This corresponds to Panaetius’s theory of the *sermo*, as reported by Cic. *off.* 1.132–137, which covers both Seneca’s *admonitio* and his *sermo* (in Seneca’s terminology, the unemotional discourse to be used, as we shall see, at a later stage in the therapy). Although the *admonitio* may rise to a high pitch (e.g., *epist.* 60.1: *queror, litigo, irascor*; cf. *epist.* 25.1, 51.13), the therapist will stir the patient’s emotions but never lose rational control of himself (e.g., *epist.* 40.7). Cf. Cic. *off.* 1.136. The appeal to the addressee’s emotions is only the first step toward the final goal of restoring his reason. Cf. Setaioli 2000: 141–155.

⁴⁵ We have already seen Seneca’s functional use of rhetoric in his “Consolations.”

⁴⁶ Cf. n. 15.

⁴⁷ *SVF* III 474. Significantly, Chrysippus expressed this idea while writing about the therapy of passions (*en tōi peri pathōn therapeutikōi*). He expressly mentions a Peripatetic as well as an Epicurean approach. These can be used to avoid jeopardizing the success of the therapy by losing time with doctrinal refutations. As far as Epicureanism is concerned, he says that the therapist must show the patient that even that doctrine rules out passion.

⁴⁸ Some have argued that Lucilius’s original leanings were Epicurean (cf. *Epicuri tui: epist.* 23.9). See Setaioli 1988: 201 n. 866. More recently, Lucilius’s Epicureanism has been denied by Graver 1996: 27 (following Griffin 1976: 350–352), and asserted by Wacht 1998: 528. Chrysippus’s fragment seems to suggest that the idea cannot be lightly discarded.

Also, we must not forget that Seneca accepts Posidonius's doctrine of the existence of an irrational element within the human soul.⁴⁹

In spite of these antecedents in Greek Stoicism, some scholars tend to believe that Seneca sacrifices rational understanding in favor of a merely emotional appeal to make his addressees accept Stoicism.⁵⁰ This is because the stage of the rhetorical *admonitio*—which, to be sure, is the most obvious aspect of Seneca's work—is often mistaken for the whole of his therapeutic program, whereas it is only the first, propaedeutic stage.⁵¹ Seneca leaves no doubt about this.⁵² We shall soon see that the final stage addresses reason, and no longer the emotions.

4.

Before we do that, however, we must look at the next therapeutic step suggested by Seneca: what he calls the *meditatio*.⁵³ This resorts to techniques that are still verbal, but are matched by a series of practical or partly practical

⁴⁹ *Epist.* 92.1. Posidonius is quoted at 92.10. Of course, the irrational element must obey the rational one. For our purpose it hardly makes any difference whether the beginning of the letter goes ultimately back to Posidonius, as I think it likely (see Setaioli 1988: 304 f.; Setaioli 2000: 298 f. n. 126, with the literature quoted and discussed) or his influence is limited to the words reported under his name at § 10, as others maintain. See lastly Setaioli 2007a: 689 n. 3.

⁵⁰ This happens even in a fairly recent paper: Cooper 2006 (p. 47: "there is a danger—and I will argue that Seneca falls victim to it—that in relying so heavily on these rhetorical, emotion-evoking devices of the spiritual director, a Stoic writer will tend to forget or neglect the fact that the ultimate goal [...] is to achieve a full philosophical understanding of the reasons why the truths of Stoicism really are true"; p. 55: "Seneca so completely cuts off the basis on which he is encouraging his addressee to live from the reasons provided by Stoic philosophical theory for living that way, that it becomes highly questionable whether they *can* be making real progress toward virtue and the fully happy life if they follow him"). Newman 1989 makes a similar mistake concerning the *meditatio*. See below, n. 66. But Seneca's obvious annoyance with dialectical niceties does not imply that he recognizes no theoretical foundations to the ideas and behaviors he preaches.

⁵¹ Connected with this is the equivocation concerning the place of the *praecepta* and the *decreta* (discussed in Epistles 94 and 95) in the therapeutic program. Some (e.g., Newman 1989: 1484) have maintained that learning general theory (*decreta*) precedes listening to specific directions (*praecepta*). Although Seneca is not clear on this point (*epist.* 95.38, 95.54 vs. *epist.* 95.64), however, we know that the *praecepta* generally preceded (cf. Dihle 1962: 92). The style of the *admonitio* is fit for the *praecepta*, whereas the *decreta* require a different type of discourse, the *sermo* (Setaioli 2000: 118). See below.

⁵² *Epist.* 33.6 f., 38.1, 94.43.

⁵³ As already noted, this takes place at a stage later than "conversion": people who practice *meditatio* have already agreed to embark on their ethical improvement.

exercises.⁵⁴ The verbal *meditatio* can be considered a form of autosuggestion, the practical exercises a form of preparatory asceticism.⁵⁵ It has become customary to speak of "spiritual exercises" in Seneca and in other ancient philosophers, but it can be dangerous to pair their therapeutic practices with those preached by St. Ignatius of Loyola.⁵⁶

Whereas *admonitio* could address all passions, *meditatio* is basically designed to conquer fear (itself one of the Stoic main passions) by steeling Seneca and his addressees against the dread of future mishaps, such as poverty, sickness, exile, and the like.⁵⁷ Just like *admonitio*, it does not yet address the rational sphere in as much as it does not try to correct wrong judgment and prove that all mishaps are really no evils, but only "indifferents" (*adiaphora*). This would be in line with Stoic theory, which at this stage Seneca's addressees are not yet expected to have mastered. Actually, in some letters to Lucilius, we see Seneca seemingly adopt Epicurus's point of view, refusing, like the Greek master does, to worry about what might indeed never happen.⁵⁸ His more common attitude, however, is quite different: he advises that we must expect that all possible mishaps will indeed happen, in order to be prepared for them all.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ As remarked by P. Hadot (1981a: 14), this behavior is "l'œuvre non seulement de la pensée, mais de tout le psychisme de l'individu." Seneca's term *meditatio* corresponds to the Greek *meletē*; not rarely it is joined by *exercere* / *exerceri* / *exercitatio* (cf. Greek *askēsis*). Cf. Bellincioni 1979: 184f.

⁵⁵ Such exercises are rehearsals and must not be confused with the ultimate standards of behavior, which can be acquired only at the end of the therapeutic process. Cf. below, n. 103.

⁵⁶ This has been done by Rabbow 1954, who is rightly criticized by Newman 1989: 1476 n. 6. Seneca's final goal was obviously different from Ignatius's. For the practice, see also I. Hadot 1969.

⁵⁷ See Armisen-Marchetti 1986: 186–188 and Wacht 1998: 526–528 for the philosophical antecedents of this practice. It had also been adopted by the Stoics (e.g., *SVF* III 482, and see Wacht 1998: 528 n. 74).

⁵⁸ Cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 3.32: [*Epicurus censet*] *neque vetustate minui mala nec fieri praemeditata leviora, stultamque esse meditationem futuri mali aut fortasse ne futuri quidem: satis esse odiosum malum omne, cum venisset; qui autem semper cogitavisset accidere posse aliquid adversi, ei fieri illud sempiternum malum.* Cf. Sen. *epist.* 13.4: *illud tibi praecipio ne sis miser ante tempus, cum illa quae velut imminetia expavisti fortasse numquam ventura sint, certe non venerint; 74.33: quid autem dementius quam angere futuris nec se tormento reservare, sed arcessere sibi miseras et admovere?* Here Seneca adopts one of Epicurus's remedies (*avocatio a cogitanda molestia*: cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 3.33) and clearly says he is not following Stoicism (*non loquor tecum Stoica lingua: epist.* 13.4). In the "Consolations" he recommends Epicurus's other remedy (*revocatio ad contemplandas voluptates*: Cic. *ibid.*): *epist.* 99.4f., 99.23, *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*) 10.3. Cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1986: 188, 191–193, Wacht 1998: 526–529. We have already seen (*supra*, n. 47) that even Chrysippus admitted of doctrinal incongruity when urgent therapy was needed. A change of attitude appears at *epist.* 24.1f.

⁵⁹ Statements to this effect are almost countless in Seneca. See Armisen-Marchetti 1986,

Limits of space force us to make a mere mention of the greatest worry to be conquered: fear of death. This would require a paper, or rather a monograph, in its own right.⁶⁰ Following in the wake of a long tradition, Seneca considers the *meditatio mortis* to be the most necessary of all *meditationes*,⁶¹ on the one hand because this is the one mishap which is sure to happen, on the other because it is the only one that cannot be enacted or rehearsed in advance.

One noteworthy aspect of the verbal *meditatio* is, in Newman's words, "the constant and rigorous application of particular phrases and images."⁶² This will involve continuous repetition of the same ideas and encourage their ever-varying rhetorical cast⁶³—a characteristic in perfect agreement with Seneca's own way of writing. We can understand Fronto's stern criticism,⁶⁴ even though he clearly misses the connection between Seneca's repetitious style and his ethical aims.

It is perfectly clear that, like the *admonitio*, the verbal *meditatio* resorts amply to rhetorical devices addressing the emotions rather than reason.⁶⁵ It is a sort of autosuggestion, which can be extremely useful from the therapeutic point of view, but can hardly be considered "the sole means for attaining the *vita beata*" or "the most important part of his (Seneca's) teaching";⁶⁶ the appeal to the emotions is inherently propaedeutic, the final goal being in fact the restoration of reason. What makes the *meditatio* important is the

Newman 1989, Wacht 1998. As Armisen-Marchetti (1986: 191 f.) shows, Seneca is not being inconsistent, but simply postponing the *meditatio* to the moment in which the *proficiens* is advanced enough to have gained rational control of the anticipation of future mishaps, rather than be overcome by it.

⁶⁰ We shall only note that death (as well as exile: cf. *epist.* 85.41, 91.8) is already addressed in the "Consolations"; a further proof that these do not basically differ from the rest of Seneca's writing.

⁶¹ E.g., *epist.* 70.18; and other countless passages in Seneca.

⁶² Newman 1989: 1475.

⁶³ Cf. Newman 1989: 1480, Graver 1996: 130. Seneca makes this very clear, in practice as well as in theory. Cf., e.g., *epist.* 27.9: *hoc saepe dicit Epicurus aliter atque aliter, sed numquam nimis dicitur quod numquam satis discitur*; 94.26: *quaecumque salutaria sunt saepe agitari debent, saepe versari, ut non tantum nota sint nobis sed etiam parata*. Cf. Bellincioni 1979: 159 for similar passages.

⁶⁴ Fronto *ad M. Anton. De orationibus* 4 (II, p. 104 Haines): *primum illud in isto genere dicendi vitium turpissimum, quod eandem sententiam milliens alio atque alio amictu indutam referunt*.

⁶⁵ Cf. Newman 1989: 1475, 1478, 1488 f., 1494. Newman, however, hardly distinguishes between *admonitio* and *meditatio*. A clear and convincing picture of the links connecting *meditatio* with rhetoric is sketched by Armisen-Marchetti 2004–2005.

⁶⁶ Newman 1989: 1488. Cf. p. 1484 ("the heart and soul of the ethical life"), though there we find an important qualification ("the only means by which the *parenetic* part of philosophy can be effective"; the emphasis is mine).

fact that it aims not merely at providing a momentary soothing of fear, but at producing a permanent spiritual transformation,⁶⁷ which will make it possible to advance to the next step of therapy.

The practical or partly practical exercises that accompany the verbal *meditatio*, although also mainly designed to conquer fear, are wider in scope. They may address the opposite passion, too, namely desire;⁶⁸ they may also have other goals: for example, learning to concentrate in an unfavorable surrounding,⁶⁹ or to alternate company and isolation in view of personal ethical advancement.⁷⁰ Ultimately, they aim to achieve the permanent transformation of *bona voluntas* into *bona mens* and of *impetus* into *habitus animi*.⁷¹

Partly practical exercises include self-scrutiny and the morally profitable use of imagination. Seneca's investigation of the self has been examined in depth by Alfonso Traina⁷² and in a more summary fashion by Michel Foucault.⁷³ Here, we will only mention self-scrutiny as a "spiritual exercise."⁷⁴ Seneca both practices this on a daily basis⁷⁵ and urges others to do so.⁷⁶ Unlike other exercises, self-scrutiny looks back to the past, rather than forward to the future; but only by knowledge of the self will it be possible to become better⁷⁷ and to act effectively to help others, now and in the future. As Traina has aptly pointed out, Seneca's thought and language are in constant swing from the inner to the outer world, and vice versa. Self-scrutiny and self-transformation proceed at the same rate;⁷⁸ actually the idea of self-transformation is most impressively formulated precisely in this connection: *intellego, Lucili, non*

⁶⁷ As already seen in the "Consolations."

⁶⁸ Cf. *epist.* 123.3: *debemus exerceri ne haec timeamus, ne illa cupiamus*.

⁶⁹ Cf. the lively description in *epist.* 56.

⁷⁰ E.g., *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*) 17.3; but more frequently Seneca urges isolation from the crowd, whose influence can easily nullify the progress of the *proficiens*.

⁷¹ Cf. *epist.* 16.1 and 6 respectively.

⁷² Traina 1974: 9–23. Among later studies we may mention Lotito 2001.

⁷³ Foucault 1986: 53 f.

⁷⁴ Cf. Edwards 1997.

⁷⁵ *Dial.* 5 (= *de ira* 3).36, *epist.* 83.2. The practice originated in Pythagoreanism: cf. Cic. *Cato* 38; at least from a certain stage on, it was not meant to train memory (as maintained by Inwood 2005a: 343), but to improve the self: cf. *carm. aur.* 40–44, Hierocl. *in carm. aur.* 19, pp. 79–84 Koehler.

⁷⁶ *Epist.* 16.2, 28.10, 68.6.

⁷⁷ *Epist.* 28.8: "initium est salutis notitia peccati." *egregie mihi hoc dixisse videtur Epicurus; nam qui peccare se nescit corrigi non vult; deprehendas te oportet antequam emendes*. Cf. Setaioli 1988: 220 f. for the peculiarly Senecan twist Epicurus's sentence receives in the context.

⁷⁸ Cf. Edwards 1997: 31. See Traina 1974: 41 for Seneca's "linguaggio dell'interiorità" and "linguaggio della predicazione."

emendari me tantum sed transfigurari.⁷⁹ This verb, the Latin rendering of *metaschēmatisesthai*,⁸⁰ is followed by other expressions implying change and improvement,⁸¹ as well as by the ubiquitous medical metaphor.⁸² At this stage, however, the process is far from being concluded: Seneca has changed, but he is still far from the goal; wisdom has not yet been attained: he finds that there is still much in him that needs changing.⁸³ Self-scrutiny may go beyond opening the *proficiens'* eyes and actually initiate his reformation, but it can hardly bring it to conclusion.

An exercise involving the use of imagination consists in fancying that our behavior is watched by some highly respected and ethically irreproachable figure.⁸⁴ This obviously implies that the *proficiens* is still far from being able to stand on his own; he must be well on his way to spiritual sanity before he can dispense with such a tutor.⁸⁵

Among the exercises involving practical behavior⁸⁶ the most striking is the rehearsal of an undesirable situation, which those who had not assimilated Stoic theory feared and wrongly considered to be an evil, namely poverty. It was a form of asceticism⁸⁷ which in Seneca's times had lost much of its original meaning and had become a form of ostentatious snobbishness.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ *Epist.* 6.1.

⁸⁰ Cf. Bickel 1957; also the clarifications and remarks about the Greek word and Seneca's use of *transfigurare* in Setaioli 1988: 283–285.

⁸¹ *Epist.* 6.1: *hoc ipsum argumentum est in melius translati animi quod vitia sua quae adhuc ignorabat videt [...]* 2: *cuperem itaque tecum communicare tam subitam mutationem mei.*

⁸² *Epist.* 6.1: *quibusdam aegris gratulatio fit cum ipsi aegros se esse senserunt.*

⁸³ *Epist.* 6.1: *nec hoc promitto aut spero, nihil in me superesse quod mutandum sit.* It may be interesting, from the linguistic point of view, to compare the present passage (*intellego [...] me [...] transfigurari: epist.* 6.1) with *epist.* 94.48: *nondum sapiens est nisi in ea quae didicit animus eius transfiguratus est* (reporting Ariston's thought). Whereas *transfigurari* is an *infectum*, describing an event still in progress, *transfiguratus est* is a *perfectum*, indicating that the process is completed, i.e., the goal has been reached.

⁸⁴ This is again an idea that Seneca borrows from Epicurus: *epist.* 11.8, 25.5f. Cf. Setaioli 1988: 195f.; for Seneca's Roman adaptations cf. Setaioli 2003: 60f. See also *epist.* 104.21f. At *epist.* 32.1 Seneca suggests himself acting as Lucilius's absent tutor (as Epicurus—and Zeno—had done before him).

⁸⁵ *Epist.* 25.6: *cum iam profeceris tantum ut sit tibi etiam tui reverentia, licebit dimittas paedagogum.*

⁸⁶ For other types of practical exercises see *supra* (notes 68–70).

⁸⁷ Seneca had adopted several ascetic practices, including vegetarianism, in the enthusiasm of his youthful conversion to Pythagoreanism, but, as he tells us, had retained just a few of them: *epist.* 108.15f.; cf. 53.3, 83.5, 92.25. For the meaning and import of *askēsis* in the ancient world see the bibliography quoted by Allegri 2004: 13 n. 1.

⁸⁸ *Epist.* 18.7: *non est nunc quod existimes me dicere Timoneas cenas et pauperum cellas et quidquid aliud est per quod luxuria divitiarum taedio ludit; 100.6: desit sane varietas marmorum [...] et pauperis cella et quidquid aliud luxuria [...] miscet.*

But Seneca is extremely serious about it. He advises exercises in voluntary poverty to Lucilius⁸⁹ and practices them himself.⁹⁰ Poverty is certainly not necessary to wisdom;⁹¹ what is important in this exercise is the shift from a form of defense against a dreaded mishap to the actual rehearsal of the self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) of the wise man.⁹²

But although this exercise, too, aims at ethical improvement, it is still a long way from the final goal. That poverty is no evil is not proved by theoretical reasoning exposing it as a mere "indifferent," but only through practical rehearsal. "Is this, then, what I feared?"⁹³ So Lucilius will say after submitting to this experience. And Seneca himself will learn through this very exercise that he still has a long way to go.⁹⁴ In his own words, his *impetus* has not yet become a *habitus animi*.⁹⁵

5.

In the ambitious attempt to bring Seneca's therapeutic project to its final goal, it will be necessary to resort once more to verbal tools; but it will be a type of discourse very different from the rhetoric appealing to the emotions, which Seneca promotes in theory and in practice for his ethical *admonitio* (and also for verbal *meditatio*). A clear theoretical sketch is provided by Seneca in Epistle 38. The *admonitio* needs oratorical forms (*disputationes, contiones*) in as much as it aims to convert, or at any rate to sway the addressee's mind;⁹⁶ but when it comes to actually instructing him in the theoretical foundations of wisdom, what is needed is the *sermo*,⁹⁷ which, in Seneca's own words, is concerned with *res*, not with *verba*;⁹⁸ is addressed to reason; and dispenses

⁸⁹ *Epist.* 18.5 f., 20.13.

⁹⁰ *Epist.* 87. For an in-depth analysis of this epistle, see Allegri 2004.

⁹¹ Seneca is a Stoic, not a Cynic: cf. Scarpit 1975: 92 f., Goulet-Cazé 1986: 185 f., Rist 1989: 1994.

⁹² Cf. Allegri 2004: 19, 25. For Seneca, e.g., *epist.* 20.8. The *autarkeia*, however, is still merely rehearsed, not yet theoretically grasped and acquired.

⁹³ *Epist.* 18.5: *hoc est quod timebatur?*

⁹⁴ *Epist.* 87.5: *parum adhuc profeci: nondum audeo frugalitatem palam ferre; etiamnunc curo opiniones viatorum*. See the analysis by Allegri 2004: 34–42. Just as Seneca addresses consolations to others but is unable to console himself (cf. *supra*, n. 31), so he advises Lucilius to undertake exercises in poverty by which he is himself exposed as still very far from perfection. Even the exercise of Epistle 56 ends in failure.

⁹⁵ Cf. *epist.* 16.6 (*supra*, n. 71).

⁹⁶ Such oratorical forms are indeed necessary *ubi qui dubitat inpellendus est* (*epist.* 38.1); cf. *epist.* 87.41.

⁹⁷ The *sermo* is indeed necessary *ubi [...] non hoc agendum est, ut velit discere, sed ut discat* (*epist.* 38.1).

⁹⁸ Cf. *epist.* 40.14, 52.14, 59.4 f., 75.7, 100.10, 108.6 f., 115.1, *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*) 1.13.

with any appeal to the emotions.⁹⁹ For Seneca, the philosopher must be able to command both types of discourse.¹⁰⁰

Although most of Seneca's work does indeed keep within the earlier therapeutic stages sketched above, and although whatever theoretical elements can be detected in it are anything but systematic, we cannot overlook the fact that he does envisage a further stage during which the philosophical basis of wisdom will be taught and learned. Although at times he tends to move even the *decreta*—the theoretical principles of ethics—into the sphere of the *praecepta*—the practical instructions¹⁰¹—it is nevertheless clear that the final goal of his therapy can be reached only when the patient has mastered and assimilated the philosophical principles. This has not happened in the previous stages, and for this reason the *praecepta* given at that time are often ineffective.¹⁰² Only when action is guided by theoretical knowledge can the level of ethical perfection marked by virtue be attained.¹⁰³ The final stage of the *studium sapientiae* coincides with the acquisition of philosophical awareness.

6.

Our survey of the stages and procedures in the therapy that aim to restore sanity and effect a (self-)reformation enabling the attainment of wisdom and virtue would not be complete without at least hinting at a very important

⁹⁹ More on this will be found in Setaioli 2000: 111–217 (esp. 116–120). See also *supra*, n. 44.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Setaioli 2000: 118f.

¹⁰¹ *Epist.* 94.31: *quid enim interest inter decreta philosophiae et praecepta nisi quod illa generalia praecepta sunt, haec specialia?*; 95.34: *in hac ergo morum perversitate desideratur solito vehementius aliquid quod mala inveterata discutiat: decretis agendum est ut evellatur penitus falsorum recepta persuasio*. Note the “agonistic” ring of the latter passage, which is unexpected in reference to the *decreta*, allegedly suited to be expressed by the unemotional *sermo* rather than by the pugnacious *admonitio*. It is nevertheless apparent that in the last epistles problems of theory tend to become more and more important. Lucilius, by now, appears to be past the stage of *admonitio* and ready for proper philosophical instruction; to use the terms of *Epistle* 38.1, Seneca is no more addressing him *ut velit discere*, but rather *ut discat*. Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 191–200.

¹⁰² The clearest passage is perhaps *epist.* 95.37f.; cf. 94.6–8. The latter passage reports Ariston's thought, which Seneca later rebuts, but only as far as the alleged uselessness of *praecepta* is concerned. Ariston's central point—the need to correct the wrong opinion, which considers the *adiaphora* to be real goods or evils—is surely shared by Seneca.

¹⁰³ *Epist.* 90.45: *virtus non contingit animo nisi instituto et edocto et ad summum adsidua exercitatione perducto*; 94.47: *pars virtutis disciplina constat, pars exercitatione; et discas oportet et quod didicisti agendo confirmes*. In these passages the *exercitatio* is not preparatory rehearsal but real practical application—though still tentative at first—of philosophical principles securely assimilated. Cf. Bellincioni 1979: 186f. In the second passage Seneca includes the *praecepta* in these principles.

instrument the *proficiens* can avail himself of, namely books and reading¹⁰⁴ (writing being the reverse of the coin). The centuries that had elapsed since the famous myth of Theuth in Plato's *Phaedrus*, disparaging writing in favor of lively word of mouth,¹⁰⁵ had obviously not affected its appeal; an attitude wary of books and reading (as well as writing) is still apparent in Epictetus.¹⁰⁶ Seneca, however, was not a freedman delivering public lectures in Greek, but a member of the Roman aristocracy addressing his social peers in Latin;¹⁰⁷ so his teaching must be institutionally committed to the written word.¹⁰⁸ As a possible rejoinder to Plato, Seneca stresses the latter's superiority over oral instruction: writing (in the case in hand, letter writing) will not allow for offering advice for an immediate situation, but it is the proper vehicle for universal teaching, valid for everyone, including posterity¹⁰⁹—which, as Seneca repeatedly says, is his ultimate addressee.¹¹⁰

As Lucilius progresses under Seneca's guidance, he begins to help Seneca progress too.¹¹¹ At the same rate, he is not merely the addressee of Seneca's books:¹¹² it is probably no coincidence that two consecutive epistles picture Seneca and Lucilius exchanging books of philosophy written by themselves.¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ Graver 1996 devoted a brilliant dissertation to this topic, unfortunately taking no notice of my essay on Seneca's theories of style and literary activity (Setaioli 1985; cf. below, n. 122). Cf. also Guglielmo 1997.

¹⁰⁵ Plat. *Phaedr.* 274c–278b.

¹⁰⁶ Epict. *diss.* 1.26.16, 4.4.2–18, 30, 33, 40–41. Cf. Graver 1996: 3 f., 6, 50–56 (on p. 52 Crates of Mallos is mistakenly substituted for Crates of Thebes). Epictetus does admit of reading if it aims at ethical improvement, but appears to be much more narrow-minded than Seneca in this respect. See below.

¹⁰⁷ The entire Epistle 40 is instructive of Seneca's attitude toward philosophical lectures in Greek. Cf. Setaioli 1988: 14 f.

¹⁰⁸ Epist. 33.9: *quid est quare audiam quod legere possum? "Multum" inquit "viva vox facit." Non quidem haec quae alienis verbis commodatur et actuari vice fungitur.* This, of course, must be taken with a grain of salt: cf. *epist.* 6.5 f. In Epistle 33, however, we witness a neat reversal of the positions of Epistle 6. As we shall see, Epistle 33 advocates the reading of philosophical works in their entirety—a far cry from Epistle 6.5: *mittam itaque ipsos tibi libros, et ne multum operae inpendas dum passim profutura sectaris, inponam notas, ut ad ipsa quae probo et miror accedas.* Epistle 33 obviously marks a more advanced stage. Cf. *epist.* 39.1.

¹⁰⁹ Epist. 22.1 f.

¹¹⁰ Epist. 8.2, 21.5, 22.2, 64.7. Cf. 79.17.

¹¹¹ Epist. 34.2.

¹¹² As is the case with the preserved *Epistulae morales*, *De providentia*, and *Naturales quaestiones*. Cf. also *epist.* 106.1–3, 108.1.

¹¹³ In Epistle 45 Seneca sends Lucilius books, including some by himself (*libros meos*: 45.3); in Epistle 46 he receives a book by Lucilius. The content is surely philosophical (*fecit aliquid et materia*: 46.2; cf. *epist.* 75.3, *dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*] 1.14).

Reading and writing not only promote the *meditatio*, but can be counted among the exercises helping us advance on the long path to wisdom.¹¹⁴

But reading has a place in more than one stage of Seneca's therapy.¹¹⁵ One application appearing from the very beginning of the collection of the *Epistulae morales* easily fits into the frame of the *meditatio*. Epistle 2¹¹⁶ stresses the function of reading as nourishment for the soul, but also insists on narrowing down the range of reading material to a small number of trustworthy authors to be read over and over again,¹¹⁷ in order to glean some chosen thoughts to assimilate in the manner of the *meditatio*. At the end of the epistle Seneca offers Lucilius, as an example, a sentence by Epicurus, and will do the same in most of the following twenty-seven letters.¹¹⁸

This, however, is far from being Seneca's final word on reading.¹¹⁹ A more open position is already sketched in Epistle 33, shortly after discontinuing appending (mostly Epicurean) sentences to the letters. This epistle stresses the need to read texts (significantly, of Stoic philosophers) in their entirety, while at the same time urging originality within tradition. This idea is fully developed in Epistle 84,¹²⁰ which takes the cue from the rhetorical theory of imitation¹²¹ to develop a strikingly "modern" conception of cultural training and education.

¹¹⁴ Cf., e.g., *epist.* 89.23: *haec aliis dic, ut dum dicis audias ipse, scribe ut dum scribis legas*. Interestingly, Lucilius, the recipient of Seneca's *admonitio*, is in turn urged to address spoken and written *admonitio* to others as a way of assuring his own ethical progress. No wonder Seneca never leaves his writing tablets (*epist.* 87.3), and states (*epist.* 82.3) that *otium sine litteris mors est et hominis vivi sepultura*. See below, n. 132, for the *topos* of the *mortua vita*.

¹¹⁵ The extreme statement of Epistle 88.32 (*quid est autem, quare existimem non futurum sapientem eum, qui litteras nescit, cum sapientia non sit in litteris?*), which not surprisingly parallels a Cynic position (Antisthenes: Diog. Laert. 6.103; cf. Stückelberger 1965: 132), must be seen in the context of the letter. Cf. Setaioli 1988: 316–322.

¹¹⁶ See the analyses of von Albrecht 2004: 24–33 and Graver 1996: 125–131.

¹¹⁷ The dangers of uncontrolled reading are stressed elsewhere, too: e.g., *epist.* 45.1, 88.36–40, 89.18, *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).9.4–6, *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).13.1–7, and *epist.* 106.11, the famous *non vitae sed scholae discimus*. *Epist.* 108.24–34 describes different approaches to reading. The only valid one is the "philosopher's," in as much as he reads for the sake of moral improvement.

¹¹⁸ Of course in most cases we are able to ascertain that Seneca found these sentences already collected in a *gnomologion*. Cf. Setaioli 1988: 182–223.

¹¹⁹ The transition from the position of Epistle 2 to the one developed in Epistle 84 is not abrupt, however. In both cases, for instance, the teachings drawn from reading are nourishment for the mind (2.2, 84.1), and must be "digested" (2.4, 84.6–7).

¹²⁰ Continuity between Epistle 33 and Epistle 84 is emphasized at the level of linguistic expression, too: *epist.* 33.8: *aliud tamen est meminisse, aliud scire eqs.*; 84.7: *concoquamus illa; alioqui in memoriam ibunt, non in ingenium*.

¹²¹ Seneca was familiar with the rhetorical theory of *imitatio* / *aemulatio*, as shown by Epistle 79. Cf. Setaioli 2000: 199 f. He had even developed a compromise between *aemulatio* and the

Limits of space do not allow for further detail.¹²² It is perfectly clear, however, that at this stage reading is a means of self-transformation that transcends the preparatory process of *meditatio* and equips the *proficiens* with tools that will grant him intellectual independence and ethical autonomy, and will lead him to the final goal of his journey toward wisdom and virtue.

7.

When the long process we have described has come to an end, the Stoic *telos*, the *summum bonum*, the restoration of harmony with Nature and the *logos*, which is identical with happiness, wisdom, and virtue, has been reached.¹²³ That is why life must not be frittered away in useless activities,¹²⁴ but totally and constantly devoted to self-improvement in view of this goal.

Without the *studium sapientiae* life is an inextricable labyrinth.¹²⁵ Only there can we find the North Star to direct us surely and safely toward the goal.¹²⁶ And, as we have seen, life will become tolerable immediately after we have embarked on this journey.¹²⁷ What is good is not living, but living well;¹²⁸ this implies that once the ethical goal is attained, duration in time is irrelevant, and that death (suicide) must be accepted as a guarantee of freedom.¹²⁹

sort of inferiority complex common at his time toward the great classics. Cf. Setaioli 2000: 201–205.

¹²² I must refer to Setaioli 2000: 206–215. We shall only point out that Seneca reverses the traditional metaphor describing model and imitator. The latter was no more than a blank waxed tablet receiving the model's imprint (Isocr. *adv. soph.* 18, Dion. Hal. *de imit.* frg. 3, II, p. 200, 22 f. U.–R., *Dinarch.* 8, I, p. 308, 10 f., Theon *prog.* 2, p. 61, 30 f. Sp.), but in Seneca he prints his personal seal on the material he receives from the models (*epist.* 84.8; cf. 115.1). And whereas for the rhetoricians reading is the nourishment of style (Theon *prog.* 2, p. 61, 28 f.), for Seneca it feeds the *ingenium* (*epist.* 84.1). Also, he changes the meaning of the traditional simile equating "imitators" to honeybees being nearly the only ancient authority who emphasizes the bees' active contribution in the production of honey (*epist.* 84.5). Cf. Setaioli 2000: 209 and n. 466. The results of my essay (Setaioli 2000: 111–217—updated on pp. 397–408—first published as Setaioli 1985, but submitted for publication in 1974) find confirmation in the summary, but pertinent remarks to be found in Foucault 1983: 11–13.

¹²³ Cf., e.g., *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).8.2: *idem est ergo beate vivere et secundum naturam.*

¹²⁴ Cf. *epist.* 32.2.

¹²⁵ *Epist.* 44.7.

¹²⁶ *Epist.* 71.2–4.

¹²⁷ *Epist.* 16.1; cf. *supra*, n. 38.

¹²⁸ *Epist.* 70.4: *quae [scil. vita], ut scis, non semper retinenda est; non enim vivere bonum est, sed bene vivere; 101.15: quam bene vivas referre, non quam diu; saepe autem in hoc esse bene, ne diu.*

¹²⁹ Statements to both effects are countless in Seneca. For the idea of life's completeness

To express the fullness of life identified with the attainment of wisdom and virtue, Seneca contrives an idiosyncratic twist of the pregnant meaning that *vivere* and *vita* received in common speech when they were used to express the enjoyment of life.¹³⁰ Quite possibly he intentionally opposes his ethical and philosophical conception of a life fully lived to the materialistic one of contemporary pleasure seekers.¹³¹

For Seneca, a life not devoted to the *studium sapientiae* does not differ from death.¹³² Wisdom is an art:¹³³ and although it is different from all others, and is actually the only real art,¹³⁴ it rests on principles that can be learned.¹³⁵ Surely, only very few will be able to learn the art of living,¹³⁶ only the *sapiens* is the real “artist of life,” *artifex vitae*.¹³⁷ We cannot flatter ourselves that we will be able to become like him; but we must live our whole life never losing sight of this ideal goal.

once the ethical goal is reached, cf., e.g., *epist.* 32.3, 40.10, 77.4, 93.2 f., 101.8, etc. The passages on suicide are too numerous to be recorded here.

¹³⁰ Cf. Setaioli 1988: 273–284.

¹³¹ Cf. *epist.* 123.10, where he parodies the meaning given to *vivere* and *vita* by Trimalchio and his peers. Cf. Setaioli 2004: 57–59.

¹³² Cf. *epist.* 55.3, 60.4, 77.18, 93.2–4, *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).5.5; cf. also *epist.* 82.3 (*supra*, n. 114). For the *topos* of the *mortua vita*, cf. Setaioli 2000: 314 n. 218. At *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).7.1 Seneca tries to unify the three traditional lifestyles (*bios philēdonos*, *philosophos*, *philotimos*) under the common denominator of philosophical *contemplatio*.

¹³³ *Epist.* 29.3: *sapientia ars est*; 90.44: *ars est bonum fieri*.

¹³⁴ Cf. the whole of *epist.* 88.

¹³⁵ Cf. Bellincioni 1979: 230 (on *epist.* 95.7: *haec [sapientia] ars vitae est*).

¹³⁶ Cf. *epist.* 77.18: *vivere vis: scis enim?*

¹³⁷ *Dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).8.3, *epist.* 90.27, 95.7. Cf. Kuen 1994: 136.

ETHICS II: ACTION AND EMOTION

Margaret R. Graver

Therapeutic writing cannot help but delve into theoretical psychology. Any effort to influence a reader's behavioral dispositions will depend on certain working assumptions about how motivation works and how it interacts with belief. This is particularly true if a major concern of the therapeutic enterprise is to manage or eliminate the emotions of common experience. It was likely the practical exigencies of composing discourses to combat anger, grief, and fear that stirred Seneca's interest in the psychological underpinnings of ethically significant action and emotion. That interest remained strong throughout his career as a prose writer and can be traced in explicit assertions that he makes in his own voice in a number of different works.

These assertions are of two kinds: 1) descriptive claims about how we come to initiate different kinds of behavior, how our actions connect to our beliefs about what is best for us, and why our emotions often seem to override our better judgement; and 2) normative claims about behavior and inner experience within that idealized version of human existence which is the goal of personal development. These two philosophical agendas are linked by an integrated conception of human nature. Seneca assumes as a rule that a benevolent Nature has designed the human psyche to function in a rational way. While it is true that in our present state that rational nature is imperfect and subject to grave error, we are also capable of self-correction, and for that reason we can aspire to fulfill our human potential in lives of virtue and wisdom.

In nearly every case Seneca indicates that his positions are not of his own devising but are those of the Stoic school, *Stoici nostri* or just *nostri*. These statements should be assessed with care, both to improve our knowledge of the history of the school and to understand Seneca's own working methods. We need to be able to compare what we find in his works with the Stoic positions that were already in existence, ones that he might have learned from his teachers in philosophy or studied in treatises available at Rome. Only on the basis of such comparisons can we make any informed judgment about his relation to the ethical psychology of Chrysippus and other major Stoic philosophers—whether he is a deeply knowledgeable and orthodox exponent of early Stoic thought, an independent-minded innovator who

molds school doctrine to his own taste, or an eclectic who combines Stoic ideas with elements of other philosophical traditions.

Unfortunately, the surviving evidence does not permit us to recover all of what was written and said by Stoic philosophers in the Hellenistic period. We do not have even one of the early treatises in anything like its original form, and we often cannot say with any certainty which author developed a particular line of argumentation and when. We do, however, have sufficient information from quoted fragments and from reliable doxographies to identify at least the major psychological assertions of the most influential Stoic founders. Also, we can draw upon the philosophical writings of Cicero for evidence of the reception of Greek ideas at Rome, whether or not we think that Cicero is likely to have been Seneca's immediate source.¹

That is what I propose to do here. I will first offer a brief summary account of Stoic ethical psychology in the period before Seneca, drawing on the types of material just named and considering first the springs of action generally and then the emotions and other affective responses.² Once that account is in place, I will proceed to examine Seneca's own handling of those same points, again beginning with the theory of non-emotive action and proceeding to his views on anger and other emotions. It is, I think, in observing the way he handles the existing doctrine, his characteristic emphases and manner of presentation, that we come closest to identifying a specifically Senecan set of views on these important topics.

THE STOIC BACKGROUND: THOUGHT, BELIEF, AND ACTION

A minimum requirement for a workable theory of action is that the animate being should have some way of registering facts or potential facts about the

¹ For fuller information on these portions of Stoic doctrine and guidance through much of the surviving evidence, consult Inwood 1985, Long and Sedley 1987, Inwood and Donini 1999, Long 1999, Brennan 2003 and 2005. In what follows I cite source materials by their numbers in Long and Sedley (LS) wherever possible; the translations, however, are my own throughout. I also supply fuller details on most points covered in this chapter in Graver 2007, with additional pointers to the secondary literature.

² Our word "emotion" is the nearest match in contemporary English usage for Seneca's term *adfectus* (representing Greek *πάθος*). I do not use the older term "passion," still favored by some interpreters, because that might be taken to imply that these Stoic theories were concerned only with the most intense and damaging emotions. In fact, they addressed all levels of emotional behavior, though as we shall see, other affective phenomena were also mentioned, both involuntary feelings and the "eupathic" responses of the wise.

environment, as *that it is day* or *that danger may be approaching*. The Stoics, like Aristotle, met this need by positing as an essential function of the psyche a capacity for “impression” (φαντασία).³ Since they conceived of the psyche as a material substance, an impression was for them a momentary modification in that mind-material, comparable to an imprint in wax. This material change corresponds in some way to the immaterial proposition one has in mind. For instance, one might, as part of perceiving some external object through the senses, form the impression, “That is a horse.”⁴ Other impressions arise from within, by combining and recombining items from the mind’s existing stock of concepts.

Either way, the impression, by itself, is what one might call a mere thought. It has content of which one is aware, but no belief is formed unless one also comes to think of the relevant proposition as being either true or false. That further step was termed “assent” (συγκατάθεσις). Assent is conditioned on the character of the mind assenting: a mind characterized by tensile strength gives “strong” assent; weak minds give “weak” assent.⁵ But the likelihood and suitability of giving assent might also be expressed as a characteristic of the impression itself. Some impressions were said to be not only true but particularly clear or “graspable,” and these, when they gain assent, become the building blocks of knowledge in the person of perfect understanding.⁶ By contrast, a deranged or hallucinatory person assents to “empty” impressions.⁷

Much of the material on impressions is epistemological in interest, concerned with the nature of representation and the possibility of certain knowledge. But the basic mechanisms of impression and assent are also essential to the Stoic notion of what action is. In all animals, including humans, behavior is generated in response to impressions. The psychic event in which behavior is initiated is termed “impulse” (ὁρμή); it is this, rather than the resulting movement of the limbs, that is of interest in ethics and psychology. Naturally, the impressions to which we respond are ones we accept as true; even an animal must be assumed to believe certain things about its surroundings if it behaves accordingly.⁸ At a theoretical level the Stoics even said that an action just is a certain kind of assent. What initiates

³ Diog. Laert. 7.49–51 (LS 39A), Orig., *De principiis* 3.1.2f. (LS 53A).

⁴ Cic. *ac.* 2.21 (LS 39C).

⁵ Cic. *ac.* 1.41f. (LS 41B); S. Emp. *adv. math.* 7.151–157 (LS 41C).

⁶ Cic. *ac.* 1.40–42 (LS 40B), 2.77f. (LS 40D).

⁷ Chrysippus *apud* Aetius 4.12 (LS 39B). Compare S. Emp. *adv. math.* 7.243–249.

⁸ Chrysippus and Antipater *apud* Plut., *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1057a (LS 53S): “without assent is neither action nor impulse.”

behavior, according to one key source, is “an impulsive impression of what is then and there appropriate.”⁹ That is, an impulse can always be described as an assent to an impression with the content “it is appropriate for me to do X right now.” For instance, walking (as opposed to sleepwalking, or stumbling forward when pushed) is what happens when one decides, at some level, that walking is the thing to be doing just at that moment.

What is it, then, that sets human action apart from the instinctive behaviors of animals? As rational beings, humans experience “rational” impressions, ones whose propositional content they can verbalize when needed. And clearly, they are more reflective than even the most intelligent animals in their manner of giving and withholding assent. Specifically, human beings were said by Stoics to possess “the concept of following,” i.e., of logical consequence.¹⁰ While animals can behave in complex ways and must be assumed to perform at least some inferences, only humans recognize the associative thought process itself. Because of this only humans are capable of evaluating and amending the thought processes that underlie their own behavior. It is for this reason that the actions of rational beings are said to be “up to us” while the behaviors of animals and young children are not.

This account of action was formulated in such a way as to remain consistent with the school’s position on causal determinism. Each of our actions is determined by identifiable causes, some external to us and some internal: the external causes include impressions arising from our circumstances, while the internal causes are mental characteristics that predispose us to give or withhold assent in various cases.¹¹ At no point did the Stoics see any need to posit a special faculty of will (i.e., an indeterminate freewill), to explain why we act in one way rather than another. For them, we can make choices based upon our character, and we can also make choices that shape that character and its ways of choosing in the future, all within a determinate world-order. In speaking of the human capacity for choice the Hellenistic Stoics seem occasionally to have used the term *προαίρεσις* (“volition”), for which the best Latin equivalent is *voluntas*.¹² But their use of the term did not express any commitment to libertarianism of the sort that makes some mental events strictly independent of antecedent causation.

⁹ Stob. 2.7.9 (86W; LS 53Q); cf. 2.7.9b (LS 33I).

¹⁰ S. Emp. *adv. math.* 8.275 (LS 53T).

¹¹ Cic. *fat.* 39–43 (LS 62C). For discussion, see Bobzien 1998a.

¹² Evidence for *προαίρεσις* in the early period is reviewed in Voelke 1973: 142 f., Dobbin 1991, and Graver 2003; summary in Graver 2007: 233 n. 12.

THE STOIC BACKGROUND: EMOTION AND EUPATHIC RESPONSE

We come now to the Stoics' extraordinarily thoughtful analysis of the ordinary emotions.¹³ In identifying the causes of occurrent emotions (e.g., an angry outburst in relation to a specific event, as opposed to a persistent state of susceptibility to anger), the Stoics referred to the same explanation they gave for actions generally, saying in effect that emotions are actions and that we are responsible for them in the same way as we are responsible for any action. They did not disregard those features that set emotions as a class apart from non-emotive actions like walking across a room, but insisted that those features—in brief, the way emotions feel and their tendency to override our better judgment—can be explained without appeal to extra motivation centers or psychic functions.¹⁴

Thus an emotion was, since Zeno, defined as an “excessive impulse.” It is, in the first instance, an impulse to “contract,” “uplift,” “extend,” or otherwise alter the mind-material itself; this alteration is what we feel in the chest region when we are excited or upset. But it may at the same time be an impulse to observable action, as when we strike someone in anger. Like every impulse, an emotion is also an assent to a specifiable propositional content, and that content has a characteristic structure. This is most clearly stated in accounts of the four genus emotions: fear, desire, delight, and distress. Distress, for instance, is caused by a belief that an evil is present, combined with a belief that mental suffering is the appropriate response to such an evil.¹⁵ In assenting to the conjunct of these we accept something in the form of an impulsory impression; e.g., that “it is now appropriate for me to suffer”; that is, to contract the psyche. Some treatises must have gone into considerable detail spelling out both phenomenological and intentional accounts of numerous species emotions coming under each of the four genera; these are reflected in the extant doxographical accounts.

¹³ Source texts are collected in Graver 2002a: 203–223, and Long and Sedley 1987: ch. 65. Recent studies include Tieleman 2003, Nussbaum 2004, Gill 2005, Price 2005, Graver 2007.

¹⁴ The Stoics' entire approach to psychic activity presupposes a single command center that directs the animate being's response to stimuli. This command center or ἡγεμονικόν is just the physical center of the indwelling πνεῦμα that endows each of us with all our properties, physical and structural properties and basic life-functions as well as our mental functions. One might speak of “parts” of the psyche when distinguishing among the different activities and functions of this important stretch of πνεῦμα, but one would not mean by this what Plato (arguably) and later Platonists (certainly) meant by “parts,” i.e., multiple and competing centers of motivation. See further, notes 37–39 below.

¹⁵ Stob. 2.7.10b (90W), Cic. *Tusc.* 3.25, 61, 79.

The inclusion of the term “excessive” in the definition requires additional explanation. Chrysippus is known to have devoted extra attention to this point, seeking to clarify how it is that an emotion can occur “through impulse”; i.e., as a species of action, and yet we also feel carried away by it.¹⁶ He used the analogy of a person who tries to stop running. Because running is an inherently vigorous activity, one cannot stop just in an instant; there will always be some lag between deciding to stop and being able to stop. During that moment one feels “carried away” by forward momentum, yet we do not say that running is something that occurs in us against our will. The loss of control in emotion is like this. Once the emotional response is initiated, there is a period of time in which we cannot stop ourselves from feeling, and it is still the case that in the moment when it begins, that response occurs through a decision that we make. Consequently, it may be of some use for an advisor to try to influence that decision before the fact by arguing against the evaluative and other beliefs that dispose us in that direction. But it will not be very useful to make those same arguments while the emotion is actually going on, during the period of “inflammation” or emotional flooding. One should still make the attempt, but some arguments will certainly be ineffective.¹⁷

Emotions of the ordinary kind were classified as an activity of vice, on the grounds that they could not occur without assent to evaluative propositions that are in reality false. For instance, one does not grieve unless one believes that bereavement is a bad thing: in Stoic ethics, only one’s own moral failings are evil, so that evaluative belief is just a mistake. It follows that the elimination of false belief that comes with the accession of wisdom would entail the elimination of emotions as we know them. The wise person exhibits ἀπάθεια not by suppressing emotions but because in the condition of perfect understanding the judgments that give rise to our ordinary emotions no longer seem correct.

The Stoics did not, however, deny that the capacity for affective response is a natural characteristic of the human species. Indeed, they strongly asserted this, claiming that the ideal human condition would include perfected forms of affective response called εὐπάθειαι (“good emotions”).¹⁸ These, too, would be the responses of rational beings, experienced through impression and assent. Among the three eupathic genera “joy” involves awareness that a good

¹⁶ Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 4.2.8–18 (LS 65J), 4.6.24–46 (SVF 3.475).

¹⁷ Chrysippus *apud* Orig., *Contra Celsum* 8.51 (SVF 3.474).

¹⁸ Cic. *Tusc.* 4.12–15, Diog. Laert. 7.116. Especially helpful discussions of the underlying issue may be found in Striker 1991 and Irwin 1998.

is present, “wishing” (βούλησις) that a good is in prospect, and “caution” that an evil is in prospect. The goods and evils recognized by the wise person are not externals, however, but features of one’s own character or conduct; for instance, performing a generous action might provide an opportunity for joy. That the εὐπάθειαι have this structure is made clear by the absence of any eupathic genus for present evils: the wise have no occasion for such a response, since by definition no bad activity or trait can be present in them. Conversely, they have abundant occasion for joy, since they are continually exercising the virtues. They can rejoice, too, in the good activities of their friends, regarding these as integral to themselves through a sense of community, and can wish for those goods to continue.¹⁹ Further, they can experience erotic love toward young persons who exhibit potential for virtue.²⁰

Both emotions and eupathic responses could also be contrasted with quasi-affective phenomena that do not occur through impulse. Chrysippus was interested in involuntary tears and laughter, which he refers to impressions and to “the beginnings of the circumstances bringing about the movement.”²¹ And it is clear from several sources that nonprejudicial terms like “biting” were used by Hellenistic Stoics for low-level affective events that do not have the moral significance of emotions proper. Cicero writes, reporting Stoic doctrine, that once the “entirely voluntary belief” that grieving is appropriate is removed, distress itself is eliminated; nonetheless, the mind will still experience “a bite and a small contraction from time to time,” and this is “natural” even in the wise.²² His inclusion of the word “natural” is of interest; it suggests again the view that the capacity to experience certain feelings is accepted by Stoics as part of human nature. Also of interest is his explicit reference to “voluntary belief” in those psychic events that are properly termed emotions. This expression has a close parallel in a Stoicizing passage in Origen, where the Greek term is προαιρετικός.²³ It is reasonable to suppose that this language reflects the usage of one or more of the Hellenistic Stoics, designating actual emotions as “voluntary” as one way

¹⁹ Diog. Laert. 7.124 (LS 67P), Stob. 2.7.111 (101f. W), 2.7.11k (106W), 2.7.11m (108W), Cic.*fin.* 3.70.

²⁰ Stob. 2.7.5b9 (65W), Diog. Laert. 7.113, 130.

²¹ Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 4.7.16f. (LS 65O). Further to the history of the concept, see Graver 1999.

²² Cic. *Tusc.* 3.83. For the terminology compare Philo, *Quaestiones in Genesim* 2.57, Plut., *De virtute morali* 449a. Δῆξις was used by Zeno and Chrysippus in the same way as συστολή and ἔπασις; Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 4.3.2 (LS 65K).

²³ Orig. *Comm. in Ps.* 4.5. For *voluntarius* in connection with emotion note also Cic. *ac.* 1.38 (reporting Zeno).

of distinguishing them from unassented quasi-affective reactions, sometimes called *προπάθειαι* or “pre-emotions.”

To say that an emotion, or any action, occurs through assent or voluntarily is to say that its principal cause is some feature of one's own moral character. But where does character itself come from? Stoic explanations for emotive traits of character like misogyny or irascibility, and more generally for long-standing beliefs about the goodness or badness of certain external objects and the appropriateness of certain responses, made reference to a number of factors. They spoke of cultural influences transmitted by parents and teachers, and Chrysippus also spoke, more obscurely, of the “persuasiveness” of certain impressions.²⁴ But there are also formative influences that come from ourselves. By repeatedly desiring money, for instance, one can cause greed to become part of one's character, and conversely by exercising one's rational capacities for self-assessment and correction of view one can prevent such traits from forming.²⁵

THE THEORY OF ACTION IN SENECA

Seneca's concern with impressions, for which his usual term is *species*, is primarily as they figure in the account of action.²⁶ He does not, for instance, report the Stoic definition of an impression as a mental alteration that “reveals both itself and what made it,” and neither does he enter into the (to us) fascinating Hellenistic debates concerning the mind's powers of representation. At most he shows, in passing remarks, that he has a basic familiarity with the role of impressions in epistemology. Thus, in Epistle 71.24 he mentions the old example of straight objects that, when seen underwater, give the impression of being curved or bent; the fault, he says, is not in the objects themselves but in us. Another passage mentions the “empty” impressions experienced by the insane: “they are instigated by the impression of some circumstance that the afflicted mind is unable to refute as empty” (*dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*] 12.5). Even here, though, his emphasis falls on the role of the impression as a stimulus to action more than on the epistemological distinctions that had interested Chrysippus.²⁷

²⁴ Diog. Laert. 7.89; Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5.5.14 (LS 65M). See further Graver 2007: 149–171. Seneca echoes the first part of the explanation in *epist.* 115.11 f.

²⁵ Cic. *Tusc.* 4.24 f.; compare Epikt. *diatr.* 2.18.8–10.

²⁶ It should be noted that *species* in Seneca sometimes means “false seeming” rather than “impression.”

²⁷ *Supra*, note 7.

Again, Seneca is not much inclined to explore his school's position on impression as a physical event, viz., that it is an alteration in the psyche's directive faculty (ἡγεμονικόν). That he is nonetheless aware of this aspect of the teaching on impressions appears from some remarks he makes about animals early in *De ira*. Animals are not capable of anger, he argues, because anger and other emotions come about through certain mental operations of which animals are not capable. The reason they are not capable lies in the nature of animal impressions, which is dependent in turn on the character of an animal's directive faculty.

Just as they have a voice, but an inarticulate voice, muddled and unable to form words; just as they have a tongue, but a fettered tongue that is not free for various movements, so also their directive faculty itself (*ipsum principale*) is not in the least fine-textured or exact. Thus it receives impressions of things by which it is stimulated to impulses, but those impressions are murky and confused. Hence their attacks and agitations are vehement, but are not cases of fear, worry, sadness, and anger; rather they are just emotion-analogues (*his quaedam similia*). That is why they fall off quickly and change into their opposites: they go from fierce rage or terror to being fed, from bellowing and running madly about to immediate rest and sleep.²⁸

For any creature, it seems, the quality of its impressions can be inferred from observations of its linguistic capabilities and of its behavior generally. In non-human animals, the inability to use language and the changeable behavior Seneca describes give evidence of "murky and confused" impressions; in humans, language use and more persistent behaviors evince a capacity for clearer, more precise impressions. In both cases, theory traces the nature of the impressions back to physical characteristics of the mind.

Seneca is also well acquainted with the Stoic analysis of action as originating in assent to a hormetic or action-inducing impression "of what is then and there appropriate." He spells out the relevant doctrine with particular clarity in Epistle 113.18:

Every rational animal does nothing unless (1) it has been stimulated by an impression of some fact, (2) it has then entertained an impulse, and (3) assent has confirmed this impulse. Let me explain what assent is. "It is fitting for me to walk": I walk only when I have said this to myself and ratified this, my judgment. "It is fitting for me to sit": then only do I sit.

Here, *adsensio* is his equivalent for the Greek συγκατάθεσις, and *impetus* is equivalent to ὁρμή. But before one can actually have an impulse one must, as

²⁸ *Dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).3.7 f.; cf. *epist.* 121.12 f. For emotion analogues in animals compare Cic. *Tusc.* 4.31.

Seneca puts it, “entertain” that impulse (*impetum capere*).²⁹ After receiving some sense-impression (e.g., the availability of a comfortable chair), the mind generates a thought in propositional form as to what action might be taken; only if this is ratified does the response occur. To “entertain an impulse” is thus to have in mind a proposition like “It is fitting for me to sit.” This is exactly what the Stoic source in Stobaeus calls an “impulsory impression.”³⁰ Seneca does not attempt to replicate that exact phrase, preferring to remain within a more natural Latin idiom, but he both knows and uses the doctrine it expresses.

Further, Seneca states quite clearly the theoretical basis of the Stoic assertion that virtue and knowledge are one; or, putting it another way, that an agent whose rationality has been perfected would act properly on every occasion. Again the key conception is that of a hormetic impression, this time perhaps a “graspable” hormetic impression. In the person of perfect understanding, an impression leading to action is marked by a special clarity:

Virtue itself is located in our better part, namely the rational part. What is this virtue? True and unshakeable judgment, for from this come the impulses of the mind, and by it every impression that stimulates impulse is rendered crystal clear (*redigetur ad liquidum*).³¹

Knowledge, which for Seneca as for earlier Stoics consists not in any one item of true and justified belief but in an overall condition of harmony within the belief set, guarantees the propriety of further assent, including any assent to impulsory impressions. Thus, the wise are inerrant in behavior as well as in their theoretical judgments. From their point of view it is immediately apparent what the facts of the situation are, and they act accordingly.

Assent is all that is needed to make one responsible for action. Seneca does not employ the notion of an uncaused “act of volition” any more than Chrysippus does. Many have however been struck by passages such as the

²⁹ The expression has caused some confusion for interpreters who assume that *impetum capere* must be equivalent to Greek ὀρμᾶν, e.g., Zöller 2003: 149, Stevens 2000, Rist 1989, Ioppolo 1987: 460, Inwood 1985: 179 f., 282. For the Latin usage see *OLD* s.v. *capio* 16, and compare *epist.* 78.2: *Saepe impetum cepi abruptendae vitae: patris me indulgentissimi senectus retinuit*. See further, note 41 below.

³⁰ *Supra*, note 9.

³¹ *Epist.* 71.32. For *liquidus* in connection with the mental experience of the wise compare *clem.* 2.6: *Adice, quod sapiens et providet et in expedito consilium habet; numquam autem liquidum sincerumque ex turbido venit*. As Wildberger 2006: 78 observes, Seneca does not use *comprehendere* or *comprehensio* in the sense of the Greek καταλαμβάνω / κατάληψις.

following, in which willingness (*velle* or *voluntas*) emerges as a key ingredient in moral progress.³²

Let us press on; let us persevere. Greater challenges lie ahead than those we have overcome. But most of progress consists in being willing to make progress. This I recognize in myself: I am willing—with my entire mind I am willing.
(*epist.* 71.36)

Whatever can make you good is within you. What do you need to be good? Willingness.
(*epist.* 80.4)

The “willingness” of which Seneca speaks in these and related passages need not be interpreted as some kind of mysterious faculty for generating uncaused mental events. His point is rather that the attitude one adopts in the present toward moral progress can be expected to make a real difference in one’s future behavior. In effect, one can act now to shape those habits of mind that will determine one’s actions in the future, for instance by carefully observing the habits of some person one admires. There is a discernible continuity between this notion of *voluntas* and earlier Stoic conceptions of choice or, more specifically, “choice before choice” (προαίρεσις). A similar notion is prominent in the writings of the Greek Stoic Epictetus in the late first century AD.³³

THE EMOTIONS IN SENECA

Like other Stoics, Seneca, when speaking in a theoretical vein, treats the emotions of anger, fear, grief, and delight as a special case of action, consisting, like every action, in assent to a hormetic impression. Unlike Cicero, he does not lay out in any systematic manner the elaborate classification system of emotions by genus and species, with definitions for each; at most, he quotes a standard definition here and there as the occasion arises.³⁴ His primary interest is in the psychological basis of emotion and in the possibility that a determined progressor might alter his or her emotional dispositions for the

³² The passages quoted here are among those treated in Inwood 2005a: 135–141; see also Donini 1982: 202–204 and, among older treatments, Voelke 1973 and Pohlenz 1948–1949. The case for Senecan innovation has recently been revived in Zöller 2003; but cf. Smith 2004. *Voluntas* in Seneca may also mean “intention,” for instance, in Epistles 35.4 and 36.5 and frequently in *De Beneficiis* with reference to the intent of a person doing a favor.

³³ See *supra*, note 12, with Stob. 2.7.9 (87W). Both Kahn (1988: 255) and Inwood (2005a: 21 f.) are struck by the similarity and are inclined to conclude from it, incorrectly in my view, that Seneca is the innovator and has directly influenced Epictetus.

³⁴ Notably in *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).2.3 (anger), *clem.* 2.5 (pity).

better. He is particularly concerned that his readers understand the difference between involuntary feelings and full-scale responses that involve assent; the latter, but not the former, are subject to amelioration. In the same vein, he is careful to point out that actual emotional responses may be overwhelming in their intensity even though voluntarily initiated. For him as for his Stoic predecessors, the tendency of emotions to run away with us is an important reason to avoid having them in the first place.

Hence the first book of *De ira* goes to great lengths to distinguish Seneca's own Stoic position from the rival view that he attributes to Aristotle and the Peripatetics, that emotions can be useful and should be moderated rather than eliminated.³⁵ For him, limiting or controlling one's emotions is not a workable strategy: once one commits oneself to the impulse, there is no additional mental capacity that would enable one to control it.

With some things, the beginnings are in our power, but after that they carry us on by their own force, not allowing a return. Bodies allowed to fall from a height have no control of themselves: they cannot resist or delay their downward course, for the irrevocable fall has cut off all deliberation, all repentance; they cannot help but arrive where they are going, though they could have avoided going there at all. Even so the mind, once it propels itself into anger, love, and other emotions, is not permitted to check its impulse. Its own weight and the downward tendency of its faults must carry it to the bottom. It is best to reject the initial stimulus to anger right away, to resist its very seeds and to make every effort not to fall into anger. For if it once begins to carry us off, the return to health is difficult: there is no reasoning once emotion has been let in, once it has been granted some prerogative through our willingness (*voluntate nostra*).³⁶

Responsibility for whatever is done in anger or another emotion is firmly assigned to the reasoning mind itself. We should not make the mistake of thinking that there is some other motive force within a person, some emotive part of us that wrests control of our motivations away from the faculty of judgment. Seneca means to resist any such splitting of the psyche into opposing camps: for him, it is the mind's own mistakes that carry it away.

The mind is not off by itself, observing the emotions from outside, so as not to allow them to proceed further than they should; rather it is itself changed into the emotion. For that reason it cannot regather its useful and salutary force

³⁵ *Dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).7 f.; see also 2.35. Setaioli (1988: 141–152) discusses Seneca's sources in this portion of *De ira*; see also Fillion-Lahille 1984.

³⁶ *Dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).7.4–8.1. The imagery should be compared with Chrysippus's runner analogy, for which see note 16 *supra*. In Epistle 40.7, Seneca uses a downhill-runner analogy that matches even more closely with that of Chrysippus, but applies it to the orator who lets his eloquence run away with him.

after it has been betrayed and weakened. As I said, it does not have its own separate and disjoined location; no, emotion and reason are alterations of the mind for the better and for the worse. (*dial.* 3 [= *de ira* 1].8.2 f.)

This is very much the unitary psychology of the Stoics. Indeed, his remark about the mind being *changed into* the emotion closely resembles an account of the same issue that is cited at length by Plutarch with attribution to “Zeno, Chrysippus, and other Stoics.”³⁷

The essential moral insight of the passage is not, however, exclusive to Stoicism, but could be embraced as well by Plato, and indeed by Plato's later adherents, doctrinaire though they were about psychic tripartition.³⁸ It is simply that rather than allowing emotion to run our lives, we should act in accordance with thoughtful consideration of our long-run best interests. As long as he can maintain this objective, Seneca is not overly concerned about psychic monism for its own sake, but allows himself to speak in ways that suggest bipartition or even tripartition where rhetorical considerations make this advantageous. Even in the above material from *De ira* he does not hesitate to deploy metaphors of struggle and combat that might seem to imply some kind of division between reasoning and emotive faculties; for instance, he speaks of emotions as an “enemy” to be barricaded outside one's mental city.

Similar figurative language may be found at many places in his work, not only in the tragedies, where strict philosophical propriety is hardly to be expected, but in the prose writings as well. A passage in Epistle 92 reveals how far he was willing to go in this direction. Addressing an interlocutor who favors the idea of competing motivation-centers, Seneca writes in a way that even Plutarch might approve, mentioning a “spirited, ambitious, unruly part located in the affections” and also a “base, idling part devoted to pleasures.”³⁹

³⁷ *Virt. Mor.* 441cd (LS 61B): “They hold that the emotional [part or power] is not distinguished from the rational by some difference in its nature, but that it is the same part of the mind—I mean that which they call the intellect or directive faculty. During emotions and [other] changes in accordance with a condition or state, this directive faculty is turned and changed throughout its whole, becoming vice and virtue. And it has nothing irrational in itself, but is called “irrational” when it is carried away by the excessiveness of the impulse toward some ill-suited object contrary to reason's choosing. For emotion, they say, is wicked and uncontrolled reason, which gains additional vehemence and strength through a bad and erroneous judgment.”

³⁸ For the development of psychic monism as an issue in the ancient debate, see Gill 2005.

³⁹ The passage is well discussed in Inwood (2005a: 38–41), who also supplies additional examples of seemingly dualistic figurative language. Unlike Inwood, I am disinclined to think that Seneca posits this psychic division *merely* for the sake of argument; he is simply unconcerned about that particular debate at this point.

Yet he does not mean to depart in any serious way from the Chrysippian camp, for shortly thereafter, in Epistle 116, we find him speaking again in terms that resemble the first book of *De ira*.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Seneca does not deny that some of the feelings we experience in the presence of emotive stimuli are indeed involuntary. He makes this important concession at the beginning of *De ira* Book 2, at which point he also provides a more systematic account of the causes of anger. True anger, he says, is generated only when the mind assents to the impression of injury; it may therefore be distinguished from “that impulse which is stirred involuntarily” and which “follows immediately upon the impression itself.”⁴¹ Anger characteristically involves a linking of at least two ideas, as that one ought not to have been wronged and that one ought to take revenge.⁴² A reaction that does not involve assent does not have this complexity. Numerous examples are given, among them blushing at bad language, excitement while watching a fight, stage fright, and, interestingly, responses to literature and the visual arts. All such he calls “beginnings preliminary to emotion” and says again that they are involuntary, “movements of minds, which do not will to be moved.”⁴³ Thus, if one perceives oneself as wronged and entertains a desire for revenge, but immediately settles down, one has not experienced anger but only a preliminary to anger (*dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].3.4 f.).

Seneca did not originate the discussion of involuntary feelings within Stoicism: as we have seen, the same point is made in Cicero’s report of the Stoic theory, and there are traces of it elsewhere.⁴⁴ But he explains the

⁴⁰ Wacht (1998) rightly emphasizes the continuity between Seneca’s position in *De ira* 1 and that of Epistles 85 and 116.

⁴¹ *Dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).1.4. The impulse that is stirred involuntarily is an *impetus* in some lesser sense than the *impetus* that is genuine anger for which we are responsible (*est enim impetus; numquam autem impetus sine adsensu mentis est: de ira* 2.3.4). The passage should be compared with Epistle 113.18 cited *supra*; here, however, we have not only the mind entertaining an impulsive impression that a certain response may be appropriate, but also an observable alteration in the body (such as an increased heart rate) that could reasonably be called a response in its own right and yet stops short of being a volitional response.

⁴² Compare note 15 *supra*, and see further Vogt 2006.

⁴³ *Dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).2.5. The expressions *voluntarius* and *voluntate et iudicio* are used repeatedly in this passage in a manner strikingly similar to what we find in Cic. *Tusc.* 3.64, 3.66, and 3.83. Compare the material cited *supra* in notes 12 and 17.

⁴⁴ It is particularly striking that he favors the term “biting” (*morsus*) for involuntary feelings of mental pain, sometimes pairing it with “contraction,” as does Cicero in *Tusc.* 3.83. Examples include *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*).7.1, 1 (= *prov.*).4.1, 9 (= *tranq.*).1.9, *epist.* 99.14 f. We should not, however, assume that Seneca derives this terminology from Cicero himself, since Philo of Alexandria makes the same pairing in *Quaestiones in Genesis* 2.57. It must derive from the earlier Stoic writings in Greek.

received doctrine at much greater length than any other author, and with greater richness of examples, some clearly of his own devising. Indeed, his treatment of the theme is so elaborate as to create certain difficulties of interpretation. The most significant concerns the role of the body in affective response. Seneca says both here and in his later treatment of the theme in the *Moral Epistles* that the involuntary feelings are movements “of the body” rather than “of the mind.”⁴⁵ In view of this one might be tempted to assume that the distinction being drawn is that between a strictly mental event, i.e., the assigning of a truth-value to certain propositions, and the corporeal realization of that event. But this cannot be right, for he also calls the involuntary feelings “movements of the mind,” and some of his examples clearly require full conceptualization of the stimulus and even linguistic processing. In calling such events responses “of the body,” Seneca is merely saying that they occur without exercise of the rational mind’s most characteristic function, that of assent.

One portion of the *De ira* discussion that has often been found puzzling is section 2.4, which speaks not of two mental events, pre-emotion and emotion, but of a sequence of three:

Let me tell you how the emotions begin, or grow, or get carried away. The first movement is non-volitional, a kind of preparation for emotion, a warning, as it were. The second is volitional but not contumacious, like this, “It is appropriate for me to take revenge, since I have been injured,” or “It is appropriate for this person to be punished, since he has committed a crime.” The third movement is already beyond control. It wants to take revenge not if it is appropriate, but no matter what; it has overthrown reason.

If, as is usually assumed, this says that there is a second movement between the pre-emotion and anger itself, that would indeed be a major alteration in Stoic psychology and would present a glaring inconsistency with the Stoic position Seneca defends in Book 1.⁴⁶ However, a better interpretation is

⁴⁵ *Dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).4.2, 4.3.3; *epist.* 11.1, 71.29. *Epist.* 71.27 explicitly associates the involuntary feelings with the irrational part of the psyche, mentioning physical pain as belonging to the same category of response (Inwood 2005a: 41). For clarification concerning the Stoics’ version of body-soul dualism, see Long 1996a: 224–249; pace Fillion-Lahille 1984, Rist 1989, and Setaioli 2000: 141, one need not think specifically of Posidonius.

⁴⁶ A reading along these lines is made practically inevitable by the usual assumption of a sharp break of sense after paragraph 2.4. See esp. Sorabji 2000, who contends for Senecan innovation (esp. 61–63); also Donini 1995 and Vogt 2006: 69 f.; among older treatments Holler 1934 and Fillion-Lahille 1984: 163 f. I respond to Sorabji at greater length in Graver 2002b. Inwood (2005a: 61–63), who also stops at the end of 2.4, attempts to preserve Seneca’s orthodoxy by making the second and third movement different aspects of the same event. In fact, there is a

available. The second movement may be anger itself, which though powerful is not as refractory as what anger often leads to, namely actual loss of rationality and the behavior of the insane. For Seneca goes on to say that there is a further state of mind in which people “rage around at random and delight in human blood,” not because they believe they have received an injury, but for pleasure. Examples include Phalaris, the tyrant who tortured men for amusement, and Hannibal, who looked at a ditch filled with blood and exclaimed “O beauteous sight!” This state of mind is not anger: Seneca’s term for it is *feritas*, “brutishness.”⁴⁷ But it has its origins in anger: when anger is exercised and satiated too often, it “casts out every human contract from the mind” and passes into a new state (*dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].5.2 f.). In contrast to this bloodthirsty condition ordinary anger, for all its dangers, appears “not contumacious.”

A single episode of anger may therefore be a step along the path to the disintegration of our rational condition. But giving free rein to one’s emotions may have other consequences, which, though less extreme, are also undesirable for oneself. Seneca resembles Cicero in naming certain emotive traits of character as evils for the self. These he calls *morbi*, “diseases,” and, again following earlier Stoic theory, traces their causation to repeated episodes of the relevant emotions without effort at amendment.⁴⁸ Such conditions differ from the insanity of *De ira* 2.5 in that they are rational states, consisting in specific beliefs, deeply ingrained errors about the value of external objects. As such, they are still within the reach of moral suasion, and indeed ridding us of all such vicious dispositions is the chief aim of ethical therapy.

AFFECTIVE RESPONSES IN THE WISE

Despite his lively sense of the dangers of emotional experience, Seneca does not by any means believe that the ideal condition for human beings is one devoid of all affective response. In several of his works he speaks emphatically of the feelings of joy experienced by the Stoic sage. This joy is phenomenologically similar to the ordinary person’s delight in the birth of a

continuous line of thought from 2.1 through the end of 2.5. The interpretation given here is defended in more detail in Graver 2007: 120–132.

⁴⁷ Seneca’s treatment of the subject has some points in common with discussions of θηριότης in Aristotle (*eth. Nic.* 7.1, 7.5) and Theophrastus (*apud* Simpl., *In Aristotelis categorias* 8.235).

⁴⁸ *Epist.* 75.11 f.; cf. note 25 *supra*.

child or in winning an election: Seneca speaks of “exhilaration” (*hilaritas*) and an “uplift of the mind” (*elatio animi*). True joy, however, is constant and reliable, because its object is not some chance event but goods that come from within, that are under one’s own control and have inherent stability.

When one has such a foundation, he cannot but be visited, like it or not, by constant exhilaration, by gladness that is deep and comes from the depths. For he is rejoicing in what is his own; he desires nothing more than what he has at home.⁴⁹

This is the Stoic εὐπάθεια, although Seneca does not use that or any other class term and does not list the three eupathic responses as found in Cicero and other standard sources.⁵⁰ His emphasis on joy in particular bears comparison with the development of this Stoic theme in Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish exegete.⁵¹

While Seneca is familiar with the Stoic claim that the wise person will experience erotic love, this idea is not particularly important to him.⁵² He is, however, deeply interested in the Stoic notion of wise friendship, which he explores especially in the ninth *Moral Epistle*. The wise cherish their friends because they value the opportunity to exercise the virtues for their benefit, for instance by sitting at the bedside of one who is ill. Their affection runs deep: losing a friend is like having a hand cut off or both eyes blinded. Nonetheless, the wise person is self-sufficient (*se contentus*) and impassive (*impatiens*) in the sense of the Stoic ἀπάθεια. He will not be distressed in times of bereavement and will continue happy, taking satisfaction still in his diminished existence and confident in his ability to make new friends. He indeed feels the loss, Seneca says, but conquers it.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).4.2–5; compare *dial.* 2 (= *const.*).9.4, 4 (= *de ira* 2).6.2, *epist.* 23.3f., 27.2f., 59.1f.

⁵⁰ Seneca may in fact have been unaware of the Stoic classification of eupathic responses into three genera. In *Epistle* 85.26 he uses the word “caution” (*cautio*) for an attitude of the wise person as contrasted with the ordinary person’s fear, but seems to mean only that the wise person can act to avoid danger. This is non-emotive action, called by Stoics “selection” (ἐκλογή), rather than εὐπάθεια.

⁵¹ Philo, *Quaestiones in Genesim* 4.15f., 19, 101; see Graver 1999: 312–318.

⁵² *Amor* in *Epistles* 81.12 and 116.5 seems to refer specifically to erotic love. Erotic love in the non-wise condition is regularly classed by Seneca as an activity of vice, in parallel with anger and fear; an interesting example is *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).15.3. His affection for Paulina (*indulgendum est honestis affectibus: epist.* 104.2–3) falls into the category of tender concern for family members generally and should perhaps be treated as φιλία rather than ἐρως.

⁵³ *Epist.* 9.3–5; see further Graver 2007: 183f. On grief in others of the *Moral Epistles* see also Wilson 1997.

It is in fact quite important to Seneca's conception of the moral ideal to admit that even a perfected mind would still feel *something* in circumstances of the kind most of us would find sad or frightening or delightful. This is a theme he sounds over and over again throughout his works. Although the wise person does not believe that such things as death or the loss of a family member are evils, and so does not experience distress or fear itself, he may still tremble or grow pale or change expression when faced with such things.⁵⁴ When bereaved, he may shed tears either voluntarily, out of joy in remembering the friend's conversation, or involuntarily.⁵⁵ If he should meet with external goods, he may experience a thrill, though in comparison with his joy in virtue this will be only a "tiny, meaningless, short-lived movement of the body."⁵⁶ He can also blush.⁵⁷ In conjunction with this theme Seneca regularly adds that such feelings are "natural" or are "commanded by nature." It is his intention, he explains, to show that the wise person "does not stray outside the natural order" but is a human being like other human beings.⁵⁸ Wisdom has not altered the fundamental psychological characteristics of human nature. One retains the capacity for emotions even where that capacity is no longer exercised.

CONCLUSION

Scholarly accounts of Seneca's position relative to the ethical psychology of the older Stoa have sometimes presented him either as an innovator who developed his own significantly changed version of Stoicism or as an eclectic who combined elements of Stoicism with ideas from other philosophical traditions, perhaps under Platonizing influence from Posidonius.⁵⁹ My review of the evidence yields quite a different understanding of Seneca's overall

⁵⁴ *Dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).2.2, *epist.* 57.3, 71.29, 74.30 f.; further examples below and in note 45 *supra*. Compare *de ira* 1.16.7, on "suspensions and shadows of the emotions," mentioning the Stoic founder Zeno.

⁵⁵ *Epist.* 99.18 f. The voluntary tears would seem to be tears of joy, a eupathic response. This is the only text known to me in which a eupathic response gives rise to weeping.

⁵⁶ *Dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).4.2.4.

⁵⁷ *Epist.* 11.2.

⁵⁸ *Epist.* 71.27–29; cf. 116.3: *Quis negat omnis adfectus a quodam quasi naturali fluere principio? Curam nobis nostri natura mandavit, sed huic ubi nimium indulseris, vitium est.* Seneca associates an unnatural flatness of affect with the Cynic school, for instance in *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).14.2: *hominis naturam cum Stoicis vincere, cum Cynicis excedere.* It may be the Cynic impassivity, rather than the Stoic, that he has in mind in *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*).4.1, 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) and 16.1, 11 (= *cons. Pol.*).18.5 f. (cf. Pohlenz 1948–1949: 308).

⁵⁹ For examples see *supra*, notes 29, 32, 33, 45, 46.

project. Neither in psychology nor in ethics did he make it his business to alter any essential commitments of the school to which he adhered.⁶⁰ Although he claimed the right to abandon the official line, in fact he was well satisfied with the existing Stoic theory of action and the emotions, and devoted his efforts rather to inventing novel rhetorical strategies for putting the most edifying elements of that theory across to his readers.

Central for him is the notion that human beings are rational creatures and that rationality is perfectible: our actions are driven by belief, not by forces beyond our control, and beliefs can be corrected. Yet it is no contradiction to say that we are also emotional creatures, equipped by nature to respond affectively to what we perceive as good or evil. The goal of moral progress is not to try to eliminate all affective response, but to understand at a deep level what things really are good or bad for us. If we fail to do this, we set ourselves up for responses that can easily run away with us, with many dangerous consequences. But if we should succeed, we would not therefore become completely unresponsive to the kinds of objects that stir our emotions in our present flawed condition. We would still feel the same kinds of sensations we have now, but in slight and short-lived versions, while in response to genuine goods, the goods of virtuous action and of loving relationships, we would have new, clear, and strong feelings, and above all feelings of joy.⁶¹

⁶⁰ In metaphysics his attitude was different, but metaphysical speculation was rampant in his day; see Sedley 2005a. His views on death and the afterlife seem also to have been heterodox; see Rist 1989 and Smith, *infra*, pp. 343–361.

⁶¹ I would like to thank R. Scott Smith, who read an earlier draft of this chapter and made several very helpful suggestions.

ETHICS III: FREE WILL AND AUTONOMY*

Aldo Setaioli

1.

In a famous passage of the *Naturales quaestiones*, whose purpose is apparently to lay emphasis on the fact that human action (in the case at hand, vows and expiation ceremonies aimed at averting future misfortunes predicted by divination) does not lose its meaning in the deterministic world sketched by Stoic philosophy, Seneca makes a promise that, though related to the point being treated, appears to be wider in scope: “when the time to treat this topic comes, I shall explain how, though fate exists, something remains nevertheless within man’s discretion”¹—*in hominis arbitrio*. This promise, however, is nowhere kept by Seneca, at least in his surviving work. All the reader finds is another reference to the same problem, in an epistle where Seneca, once more, avoids tackling it directly: “this is not the time to embark on a discussion about what falls under our prerogative (*quid sit iuris nostri*) if providence is in command, or if we are bound and dragged by the chain of fate, or if unpredictable chance is all-powerful.”²

All that both passages offer are mere, if tantalizing, hints; their very linguistic cast, however, is anything but devoid of interest. Although in both cases Seneca resorts to juridical metaphors,³ he is well aware that the

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¹ Sen. nat. 2.38.3: *cum de ista re agetur, dicam quemadmodum manente fato aliquid sit in hominis arbitrio*.

² Sen. epist.16.6: *sed non est nunc in hanc disputationem transeundum, quid sit iuris nostri, si providentia in imperio est aut si factorum series inligatos trahit aut si repentina ac subita dominantur*. These two passages have often been discussed (Riesco Terrero 1966: 61f. only refers to nat. 2.38.3). Suffice it to refer to Armisen-Marchetti 2000: 210f., Wildberger 2006: I 320f. Mazzoli (1977) sees in these and other passages the announcement of a new work, the *Exhortationes*. According to him, this work contained “la più compiuta risposta al problema quemadmodum manente fato aliquid sit in hominis arbitrio” (Mazzoli 1977: 31), which he sees embodied in frg. 24 Haase = F 89 Vottero. Cf. also Vottero 1998: 61f.

³ This is true also as far as the terminology employed by the Greek Stoics is concerned. Their definition of ἐλευθερία as ἐξουσία αὐτοπραγίας (SVF III 355) resorts to juridical language (cf. Wildberger 2006: I 340), as does the further definition of ἐξουσία as νομὴ ἐπιτροπή (SVF III 544). Both definitions correspond to Seneca’s *iuris nostri*, rather than to *arbitrium*.

philosophical problem of freedom and autonomy has nothing to do with freedom in the legal sense of the word.⁴ The terms he employs in the two passages, however, appear to imply two quite different standpoints.

The word *arbitrium* conveys the idea of the power of free choice or decision,⁵ whereas *ius* signifies what one is entitled to—normally by law, rules, or regulations.⁶ This is borne out by Seneca's usage in several passages,⁷ including some in which both terms appear together with the clear semantic distinction we have just sketched,⁸ and a famous text where *liberum arbitrium* is allotted to *clementia*, which is considered to be free from the constraints of law.⁹

Before we take a closer look at these two different standpoints, we should also emphasize the fact that, in the second passage, the whole context stresses the importance of philosophy as a means of moral progress and self-transformation,¹⁰ to which one can turn regardless of whether one believes in fate, providence, or mere chance. The first two are compatible with the orthodox Stoic conception, which makes provision for both *εἰμαρμένῃ* and *πρόνοια*; mere chance, however, can hardly be reconciled with it.¹¹ What Seneca is doing here is referring to the words of the inter-

⁴ Seneca makes this quite clear: *nat.* 3 pr. 16: *non e iure Quiritium liberum sed e iure naturae* (cf. Wildberger 2006: II 930 n. 1513); *epist.* 80.5: *in tabellas vanum coicitur nomen libertatis, quam nec qui emerunt habent nec qui vendiderunt.*

⁵ Bobzien (1998a: 232) translates *in hominis arbitrio* as "in a person's power." Gourinat's translation (2005: 236) is more accurate: "something is left to the decision of men." Cf. also Wildberger 2006: I 341: "in der Entscheidungsmacht des Menschen."

⁶ Cf., e.g., *TLL* s.v. *arbitrium* (II, 412, 67 f.), *OLD* s.v. *ius* (10).

⁷ E.g., *benef.* 2.18.7, *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).15.3, *epist.* 70.19, 104.8; in all these passages *arbitrium* is expressly connected with *eligere*. At *epist.* 120.11 the life of the wise man is described as *arbitrii sui tota*.

⁸ E.g., *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*).9.3: *sui iuris et arbitrii* (Polybius's brother follows his own rules and can do whatever he wants); and the opposition *iudex/arbitrator* at *benef.* 3.7.5: *illum [= iudicem] formula includit et certos, quos non excedat, terminos ponit, huius [= arbitri] libera et nullis adstricta vinculis religio*. Even at *nat.* 2.38.3 there is an opposition *ius/arbitrium*: something is still within man's discretion, even though the opponents of Stoicism maintain that the prerogative of acting has been totally entrusted to fate: *omne ius agendi <fato> traditum*. Sen. *Med.* 137 f.: *alieni arbitrii / iurisque factus* is rightly translated by Chaumartin 1996a: 161 "soumis à la volonté, au pouvoir d'autrui." For Seneca's use of *sui iuris* and *sui arbitrii*, cf. Kurth 1994: 112.

⁹ Sen. *clem.* 2.7.3: *clementia liberum arbitrium habet, non sub formula, sed ex aequo et bono iudicat*. See on this passage Bellincioni 1984a (= Bellincioni 1986: 113–125), Malaspina 2001a: 409 f., also for the numerous occurrences of the formula *liberum arbitrium* in Livy and elsewhere. Cf. also Inwood 2005a: 207, who rightly renders Seneca's *liberum arbitrium* as "freedom of decision."

¹⁰ Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 239–256.

¹¹ See below for what Seneca has to say on *fortuna*.

locutor, who had previously equated Stoicism's fate and providence with Epicureanism's chance, as both depriving human efforts at self-improvement of all meaning.¹² Two important consequences follow: On the one hand, what is at issue is not primarily the problem of the freedom of choice, but rather the preservation of the meaning of human effort—which confirms the difference from the passage of the *Naturales quaestiones*, though there, too, as we have remarked at the outset, the whole context aims to save the significance of human action. Secondly, what Seneca means to stress is the importance of philosophy as a tool for self-transformation and improvement, regardless of the initial convictions of the *proficiens*. Such was the main purpose of his own philosophical writing, and Lucilius himself may have had Epicurean leanings.¹³ Seneca, then, had to take the freedom to embark on such a program of self-transformation more or less for granted, regardless of whatever theoretical stipulations purely doctrinal premises might entail. On the other hand, as we shall see, these were compatible with a level of autonomy that makes man morally responsible, as Seneca himself makes clear: though his nature impels man to perfect his innate reason, he acquires merits and deserves praise, if he strives to attain this end.¹⁴

We may conclude that, even as he declines to tackle the problem, Seneca provides us with important clues, which must be kept in mind as we try to sketch a fuller picture of his attitude toward these difficult questions from hints and statements scattered throughout his work.¹⁵

It has been rightly remarked that “the reconciliation of fate and moral responsibility was the dominant and characteristic problem of Stoic moral philosophy.”¹⁶ This, of course, only implies that all that the early Stoics endeavored to establish was that man possesses a certain autonomy, in that he is himself the efficient cause of what fate has established for him. His responsibility stems from this, not from a power of deciding or doing

¹² Sen. *epist.* 16.4: *dicet aliquis, “quid mihi prodest philosophia, si fatum est? quid prodest, si deus rector est? quid prodest si casus imperat? [...]”* 5: *sive nos inexorabili lege fata constringunt, sive arbiter deus universi cuncta disposuit, sive casus res humanas sine ordine impellit et iactat, philosophia nos tueri debet [...]*. For § 6, cf. *supra*, n. 2. Although chance (τύχη) was considered by the Stoics to be the aspect of fate that cannot be grasped by the human mind (cf. below, on Seneca's *fortuna*), it seems hardly likely that Seneca had the Stoic conception in mind in this reference to *casus*, as maintained by Wildberger 2006: I 337 f., following Hachmann 1995: 140 f.

¹³ Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, p. 245.

¹⁴ Cf. Sen. *benef.* 6.21.3, *epist.* 76.10, quoted and discussed below, notes 73 f.

¹⁵ As we shall see, Wildberger's attempt (2006: I 342–348) to elicit a fuller standpoint from Seneca's treatment of the *Etrusca disciplina* in the second book of the *Naturales quaestiones* (in particular from *nat.* 2.38.4 and 2.46) is hardly successful. See below, notes 71, 117.

¹⁶ Inwood 1985: 66.

otherwise.¹⁷ Accordingly, the problem of free will cannot even be posed for the Stoics, if this formula only refers to the problems arising from the idea of the freedom to decide, will, or do otherwise as related to determinism.¹⁸ As Susanne Bobzien remarks,¹⁹ determinism is firmly grounded in Stoic cosmology, although it was bound to have a great impact on Stoic ethics; but, as Brad Inwood observed,²⁰ while dealing with human action the Stoic philosophers had to assume—or rather take for granted—that their determinism could be reconciled with ethics and moral evaluation without disrupting the coherence of their system. And, as Anthony Long puts it, “it would be surprising if philosophers whose main concern was ethical, robbed the human mind of *libera voluntas*.”²¹ While investigating Seneca’s views on free will and autonomy, the way they fit in the whole picture of Stoic thinking must never be lost sight of.²²

2.

We may start with Seneca’s ideas on freedom, *libertas*. We know that Cleanthes wrote a *περὶ ἐλευθερίας*²³ and that, for the Greek Stoics, ἐλευθερία was one of the τελικά ἀγαθά.²⁴ However, as Bobzien maintains,²⁵ ἐλευθερία is never connected in the early Stoics with free choice or the power to do otherwise. She also contends that the connection between ἐλευθερία and what depends on us²⁶ was not made before Epictetus,²⁷ who allegedly

¹⁷ Cf. Bobzien 1998b: 135–137.

¹⁸ As Bobzien (1998b: 136) does. She distinguishes three types of indeterminist freedom: freedom to do otherwise, freedom of decision, freedom of will (pp. 133 f., 136). Only the first two types appear in Bobzien 1998a: 277. We will not connect the expressions “free will” and “freedom of will” with the problem of the existence of will as an autonomous part or faculty of the soul.

¹⁹ Bobzien 1998a: 16. Cf. also Long and Sedley 1987: I 342 f., 392–394, etc.

²⁰ Inwood 1985: 99.

²¹ Long 1971: 173. For the function of will in this connection in Seneca, see below, § 5.

²² According to Bobzien (1998a: 12 f.), in Seneca “there is too much, too unorthodox, too difficult, too unstructured material” to include him in a study of Stoic determinism. The Stoic framework, however, must always be kept in mind in order to assess Seneca’s pronouncements.

²³ SVF I 481.

²⁴ SVF III 107.

²⁵ Bobzien 1998a: 338 f.

²⁶ (Τὸ) ἐφ’ ἡμῖν in the standard formulation, which, however, does not seem to be attested for Chrysippus (Bobzien 1998a: 332 n. 3), unless SVF II 984 and 1007 are considered direct quotations from him, as they are printed by von Arnim. In SVF II 998 the expression τὸ παρ’ ἡμᾶς is used. According to Epictetus what was in our power was only the “use of presentations” (φαντασίαι).

²⁷ Bobzien 1998a: 341–345; cf. Inwood 2005a: 302 f.

conceived of freedom as the knowledge of what is in our power and the will to pursue only this.²⁸ But, as Julia Wildberger has pointed out,²⁹ Epictetus had not really been the first to do so. Seneca himself was fully familiar with the doctrine of “reservation” (ὑπεξάρσεις, *exceptio*):³⁰ the wise man will never be disappointed, because he always makes provision for an unforeseen intervention of fate; but what really makes the wise man successful—and free—is the absolute value accorded to moral action *per se*, regardless of the outcome.³¹ Seneca never tires of stressing this idea,³² and in this he, of course, agrees with all the Stoics.³³ This is what they meant when they stated that only the wise man is free.³⁴

Though the term *libertas* carries several quite different overtones in Seneca,³⁵ he also uses it to express the wise man's freedom, in keeping with this Stoic idea. In an interesting passage of the *De brevitate vitae* he opposes the “half-freedom” Cicero speaks of in one of his letters to the “total and solid freedom” of the wise man.³⁶ This freedom is first described

²⁸ Bobzien 1998a: 342.

²⁹ Wildberger 2006: II 927 f. n. 1509. She quotes Sen. *epist.* 51.8f. Even clearer is *SVF* III 356 (= Dion Chrys. 14.16), where freedom is defined as the science of what is permitted and what is forbidden. Dio was an older contemporary of Epictetus's.

³⁰ Discussed by Inwood 1985: 119–126, 165–175, Bobzien 1998a: 333, Reydam-Schils 2005: 28 f., 63 f., Sharples 2005: 205 f., Wildberger 2006: I 350. For Seneca, cf. *benef.* 4.34: *sapiens [...] ad omnia cum exceptione venit: “si nihil interciderit, quod inpediat.” Ideo omnia illi succedere dicimus eqs.; dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).13.3: *hoc est quare sapienti nihil contra opinionem dicamus accidere [...]; in primis autem cogitavit aliquid posse propositis suis resistere.* The often repeated (e.g., *dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*].13.4, *dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*].9.2, *epist.* 76.34, 91.3) and seemingly hackneyed idea that a foreseen misfortune hurts less must be seen in this light. For early Stoicism, cf. *SVF* III 564.

³¹ Cf., e.g., Sharples 2005: 204 f.

³² E.g., Sen. *benef.* 4.1.3, 4.12.4, 4.21.6, 4.22.2, *epist.* 14.16, 76.28 f., 93.9 f. (for the latter passage, see Setaioli 2000: 318 f.).

³³ For the common Stoic idea of the *honestum per se expetendum* and praiseworthy even if not praised by anyone, cf. Setaioli 2008. For Epictetus, e.g., *diatr.* 4.4.44, 4.8.1–4 (only the correctness of the δόγματα makes an action good).

³⁴ Cf., e.g., *SVF* I 218, 222, III 355, 362, 363, 364, 544, 593.

³⁵ Inwood (2005a: 302 f.) distinguishes four types of Senecan freedom: 1) freedom guaranteed by suicide; 2) immunity from offences and injuries; 3) freedom stemming from the acceptance of fate; and 4) freedom from passions and emotions. All these types of freedom certainly exist, and others could be added: e.g., freedom stemming from ἀτάρχεια, which makes the wise man unassailable by fortune and anything external; also freedom stemming from self-possession (see below, note 184). More to the point is perhaps a distinction between a negative conception of freedom (which Inwood's second and fourth type would fall under; cf. Traina 1987: 77) and a positive one. We cannot include the important theme of freedom guaranteed by suicide in our treatment, but it can be pointed out that this is one of the cases in which man's freedom of choice is taken for granted.

³⁶ Sen. *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).5.3: *semiliberum se dixit Cicero: at mehercules numquam sapiens in tam humile nomen procedet, numquam semiliber erit, integrae semper libertatis et solidae,*

negatively: the wise man is *solutus*, i.e., “unbound,” free of constrictions;³⁷ immediately after he is called “autonomous” (*sui iuris*), an expression that reminds us of the passage from Epistle 16 we have quoted and discussed at the beginning. So, the wise man’s freedom is not an *arbitrium*, a power of free choice or decision, but rather an autonomy granted within a normative framework.³⁸ To be free man must surely put himself above the allurements of passion and the attacks of fortune, but most of all he has to accept wholeheartedly what fate (which in Stoicism is tantamount to God or providence) has decided for him. Only when he wants what God wants³⁹ shall he be free. Seneca says this much very clearly: “freedom is obedience to God.”⁴⁰ We know that this conception of freedom, which was endorsed by the most orthodox Stoics, was later labeled a ἡμιδουλεία, a “half-slavery.”⁴¹ If we could assume that this quip was already current in Seneca’s time, it would indeed be tempting to suppose that when he says that the wise man will never be “half-free”⁴² he meant to reject this sneer at the Stoic idea of freedom.⁴³

The ontological side of this idea (accepting and actively endorsing the divine plan) perfectly corresponds to the ethical side (ridding oneself of whatever impedes man’s rational nature intended by god):⁴⁴ both are linked through the need, proclaimed by Seneca, to put ourselves at the service of philosophy, in order to attain real freedom.⁴⁵

We have mentioned the doctrine of ὑπεξαίρεσις/*exceptio*; but this is only valid in relation to man’s ignorance of God’s plan. *Exceptio* is indeed one way to prepare and fortify oneself against the unforeseen; another are the practical or partly practical “exercises” recommended by Seneca.⁴⁶ But man must always be prepared to accept as his own will whatever fate

solutus et sui iuris et altior ceteris. On this subject, see Wildberger 2006: I 348f.; and for the connection with Cicero, Setaioli 2003: 58–60.

³⁷ Cf. *supra*, note 35.

³⁸ See *supra*, on *ius* and *arbitrium*.

³⁹ E.g., Sen. *epist.* 66.39, 71.16, 74.20, 96.2; cf. Wildberger 2006: I 272–274.

⁴⁰ Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*) 15.7: *in regno nati sumus: deo parere libertas est*.

⁴¹ By the Cynic Oenomaus, polemicizing with Chrysippus (*SVF* II 978).

⁴² Cf. *supra*, note 36.

⁴³ On the other hand, Seneca may also have reacted to this sneer by a polemical exaggeration when he equates real freedom with a very special kind of slavery: *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*) 15.7 (*supra*, note 40), *epist.* 8.7 (below, note 45).

⁴⁴ Cf. Baldarotta 1994: 26.

⁴⁵ Sen. *epist.* 8.7: *philosophiae servias oportet, ut tibi contingat vera libertas*. Philosophy was, in fact, the science of things godly and human: *epist.* 89.5.

⁴⁶ Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 239–256.

has in store for him. In this, again, Seneca agrees with all the Stoics.⁴⁷ Chrysippus had expressed this idea very clearly: “if I knew that fate has decided for me to be ill, I would set my course towards this by my own accord.”⁴⁸ Seneca expresses this same idea in the words he puts in the mouth of his friend, the Cynic philosopher Demetrius, whose only complaint was that the gods had not made known to him their will, which he would have fulfilled by his own accord, no matter how hard or disagreeable.⁴⁹

According to the Stoics this is the best of all possible worlds, being ruled by deified Reason;⁵⁰ therefore what has been established from the beginning cannot be changed.⁵¹ Being in agreement with God’s plan, therefore, is to be at one with Reason and Nature,⁵² and consequently with ourselves, since our own nature is rational.⁵³ If we do not conform to God and nature, not only shall we be frustrated, but we shall renounce our rational nature. This is expressed in the clearest terms in four famous verses by Cleanthes, which Seneca translated into Latin⁵⁴ with the addition of a fifth line.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Bobzien (1998a: 347 f., 349 f.) is quite wrong when she says that the verses of Cleanthes (SVF I 527) we shall discuss below assume that one must know what fate has decided in order to conform to it. Stoics were not above resorting to divination or astrology (naturally integrated in their system: see, e.g., Sen. *nat.* 2.32, 2.45, and cf., e.g., Magris 1990: 65), but the wise man does not need to know in advance the details of God’s plan to accept it wholeheartedly.

⁴⁸ SVF III 191. Cf. Epict. *diatr.* 2.10.5 f., 3.5.9 f.

⁴⁹ Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*) 5.5. Cf also *nat.* 3 *pr.* 12: *quid est praecipuum? posse laeto animo adversa tolerare, quicquid acciderit sic ferre quasi volueris tibi accidere; debuisses enim velle si scisses omnia ex decreto dei fieri.*

⁵⁰ Partial losses or damages must be seen in the context of the well-being of the whole: see below, note 176.

⁵¹ Sen. *nat.* 1 *pr.* 3: *necesse est eadem placere ei cui nisi optima placere non possunt*; cf. 2.36.

⁵² It is of course unhistoric to consider this a rationalization: cf. Inwood 2005a: 249–270, and my review, Setaioli 2007a: 694.

⁵³ This is what the Stoics meant with their formula *ὁμολογουμένως (τῇ φύσει) ζῆν*.

⁵⁴ SVF I 527, Sen. *epist.* 107.11. Cf. Setaioli 1988: 70–82, Bobzien 1998a: 346–356, Sharples 2005, Wildberger 2006: I 294–299.

⁵⁵ In Seneca’s translation we find details that are missing in Cleanthes’s verses but are very closely paralleled in Simplicius’s commentary on the chapter of Epictetus’s *Encheiridion* quoting them: 1) the fool’s groaning as he is forced to follow fate; 2) the perfect syntactical correspondence in the expression of this idea: future indicative accompanied by present participle(s) (*comitabor gemens* ~ οἰμώζων καὶ στένων ἀκολουθήσω); 3) the fifth verse (*ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt* ~ ἀνάγκη [...] πάντα ἄγουσα, ἐκόντα τε καὶ ἄκοντα, with the typically Senecan polarizing and antithetical reduplication of the verb; though Long (1971: 195 n. 15) sees a Chrysippean distinction between “fate” and “necessity,” Seneca clearly equated the latter with fate: *nat.* 2.36., *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*) 5.8, cf. Rist 1969: 126). Unless we are ready to attribute all of this to mere chance, we will have to admit that Seneca read Cleanthes’s verses together with a commentary that was later used by Simplicius (Bobzien [1998a: 356] cavalierly dismisses

In Seneca's translation, as everywhere in his writing, style plays an important role not only in the expression, but in the very shaping of his thinking, as has been repeatedly and incontrovertibly shown by Alfonso Traina. Susanne Bobzien thinks that "whether or not Cleanthes thought that it was fated whether someone wants or does not want to follow [...], we do not know."⁵⁶ I am not completely certain about this; what is for sure, however, is that Seneca's translation shows that for him the choice between following or not, between being good or bad, is in our power: *malusque patiar facere quod licuit bono*. His antithetical reduplication of *πέισσμαι*, which he surely read in Cleanthes's fourth verse,⁵⁷ through the future *patiar* and the infinitive *facere* governed by Seneca's own and very meaningful impersonal *licuit*, introduces in Cleanthes's text the idea that taking the better course falls within man's prerogative, at least if he is wise and endowed with his own *ius*, which enables him not to become "bad"—a neat example of the inseparability of form and content in Seneca's writings, where the former, far from being a "belletristic adornment"⁵⁸ of the latter, is itself flesh and blood of his thought.

the survival of such commentaries already in the late second or early third century AD, but she is unaware of the correspondences between Seneca and Simplicius). The mixing of poetical texts with details taken from commentaries was current in Latin translations, as repeatedly pointed out by my teacher, Alessandro Ronconi. According to Bobzien (1998a: 346 n. 57, 348 n. 53), the fifth verse only shows how Seneca understood Cleanthes; Sharples (2005: 214) offers mere hypotheses about the fifth verse based on his failure to realize that the idea of "dragging" does not need to be explained through the influence of a different text, being probably the result of the antithetical reduplication of a verb (cf. *ἄγουσα* in Simplicius), so typical of Senecan style. Seneca surely read Cleanthes's fourth verse not as we find it in Epictetus (*κακὸς γενόμενος οὐδὲν ἤττον ἔψομαι*), but in the form transmitted by Vettius Valens (*κακὸς γενόμενος αὐτὸ τοῦτο πέισσμαι*), as shown by the second of his two antithetical reduplications in this line (*κακὸς ~ malus/bono; πέισσμαι ~ patiar/facere [...] licuit*). As Wildberger (2006: II 892) points out, Bobzien (1998a: 349) clearly misunderstands this verse; she takes *κακὸς γενόμενος* to be the *reason* for not wishing to follow fate, whereas it is obviously the *result* or consequence (the meaning is: "if I do not wish to follow, I will become bad and [be forced to] follow nevertheless"). The same mistake is found in Long and Sedley 1987: I 386 ("but if I become bad and am unwilling, I shall follow none the less").

⁵⁶ Bobzien 1998a: 349 (cf. already Long and Sedley 1987: I 392). Bobzien's distinction (pp. 347f.) between factual and normative universal law is groundless: for both Cleanthes and Seneca man has the duty to accept God's plan willingly; but fate will have its course, whether we accept it or not; so this law is both normative and factual. Cf. also Sen. *nat.* 3 *pr.* 12 (*supra*, note 49).

⁵⁷ Cf. *supra*, note 55. How this *πέισσμαι*, obviously the future of *πάσχω*, can be taken to be the future of *πείθομαι* (as done by Andreoni Fontecedro 1986–1987: 370 n. 16, Andreoni Fontecedro 1993, Andreoni Fontecedro 2000: 186) is beyond my comprehension. See Setaioli 2000: 233–242, Setaioli 2002.

⁵⁸ So Inwood 2005a: 164.

We should always keep this in mind, when we read the countless passages⁵⁹ in which Seneca preaches the acceptance of fate as the achievement of the only real freedom. The verb here used by Seneca (*licuit*) does not permit us to equate this with a totally emancipated *arbitrium*; nevertheless, in his translation of Cleanthes's lines what is at stake is a choice; what we should probably understand is that—whether we choose to avail ourselves of it or not—we have received the power to make the right choice through God's benevolent plan.⁶⁰

3.

Seneca, it appears, has made a really bold claim: we have been shaped (one might say “determined”) by the cosmos's supreme power, whose kin and part we indeed are;⁶¹ however, it seems that what has been given us is not merely the autonomy to act in a morally responsible way, but the actual capability of choosing and deciding. We should check how this claim is borne out in Seneca's writings and compare his views with those of the Greek Stoics on freedom and autonomy.

What Chrysippus was apparently preoccupied with was not so much asserting “free will,” in the sense of freedom of decision or of doing otherwise, but rather reconciling determinism with moral responsibility—i.e., an attempt to substantiate a “compatibilist” view leaving room for both the latter and the former. Fate acts both from outside and from inside us; our own individual nature and character is the immediate (“perfect”) cause for the way we react to an external stimulus, which is only a remote and “auxiliary” cause.⁶² Space does not allow us to go into closer detail, but we should at least refer the reader to two important testimonies on Chrysippus's view, as reported by two Latin authors: Cicero and Gellius.⁶³ It appears that not only the external stimulus but also our individual natures are foreordained by fate.⁶⁴ There is no doubt that here the concept of moral responsibility is based

⁵⁹ Space prevents us from dwelling on them here. However, I would like to point out at least an important passage that Andreoni Fontecedro (1992: 163) calls “un manifesto dell'ideologia del fato stoico”: Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*), 5, 7 f.

⁶⁰ Cf. Sen. *epist.* 31.9: *tutum iter est, iucundum est, ad quod natura te instruxit. Dedit tibi illa quae si non deserueris, par deo surges.*

⁶¹ Cf. Setaioli 2006–2007: 350 f.

⁶² Cf., e.g., Bobzien 1998a: 234–329, Sharples 2005: 201 f.

⁶³ Cic. *fat.* 39–44 (= *SVF* II 974) and Gell. 7.2 (= *SVF* II 1000).

⁶⁴ Gell. 7.2.9: *idque ipsum* (the way people with different natures react) *ut ea ratione fiat, naturalis illa et necessaria rerum consequentia efficit, quae fatum vocatur.* Cf. Bobzien 1998a: 253.

on the autonomy of the agent—in that he is himself the cause of his action, which is in accord with his nature and character—not on his indeterminist freedom of choice and decision.⁶⁵ Chrysippus, however, maintained that granting or withholding assent to the external stimulus is in our power.⁶⁶ This is not the place to stress the weakness of this position.⁶⁷ We should rather try not to miss the full implication of our testimonies.

When Gourinat⁶⁸ translates Gellius's words *ingenia tamen ipsa mentium nostrarum proinde sunt fato obnoxia ut proprietates eorum est et ipsa qualitas*⁶⁹ as “the nature of our minds is subject to fate in the same way as their own properties and their quality,” he clearly misunderstands Gellius's meaning. What Gellius is actually saying is that our different natures are influenced by fate *according to* their individual properties and quality. It should not escape our attention that shortly after Gellius says that it is not *fatale*, but *quasi fatale* that men of evil nature should not be free from fault.⁷⁰ What is meant is probably that the way we act only indirectly depends from (external) fate, the main factor being our own (internal, though itself fated) nature.

There is no trace in Seneca of the image of the cone and the cylinder with which Chrysippus elucidated his doctrine of the external stimulus (illustrated through the impulse that objects having this form receive from an exterior agent) and the personal reaction (in Chrysippus's image the way such objects move according to their shape). The doctrine itself, however, was not unknown to him. It is hardly recognizable in the passage of the *Naturales quaestiones*, where Wildberger strives to track it down;⁷¹ but it is clearly implied in other parts of his work. In a very important passage of the *De beneficiis* Seneca states that the good man cannot behave any different

⁶⁵ As Bobzien (1998a: 255) puts it, “according to Chrysippus, someone can rightly say ‘I was fated to do it,’ but could not say ‘It was fate which *did* that, hence it was not me who did that.’”

⁶⁶ Cic. *fat.* 41, 43, Gell. 7.2.11; cf. *SVF* II 981, 988, etc.

⁶⁷ Cf., e.g., Bobzien 1998a: 298 f., Inwood 1985: 70; also Inwood 1985: 99, quoted *supra*, note 20.

⁶⁸ Gourinat 2005b: 233.

⁶⁹ Gell. 7.2.7. Long and Sedley (1987: I 388) translate it correctly.

⁷⁰ Gell. 7.2.10: *est enim genere ipso quasi fatale et consequens, ut mala ingenia peccatis et erroribus non vacent.*

⁷¹ Wildberger (2006: I 346–348) tries to find this doctrine at *nat.* 2.46: [*Iuppiter*] *singulis non admovet manum: vim et causam omnibus dedit.* This reference seems striking at first sight; but the words *singulis* and *omnibus* are not connected with moral agents to which Jupiter has given an external cause or impulse (*causam*) and an individual nature (*vim*) by which they move in a certain way. Instead, they refer to events (divinatory signs) preordained by Jupiter, to which he has given a meaning (*vim*) and a purpose (*causam*).

from the way his own nature makes him behave;⁷² but he goes immediately on to say that this nullifies neither his will nor his merits;⁷³ we have already seen that although reason is the intrinsic characteristic of man, if he develops his rationality through a correct "conciliation" to his own nature, he deserves praise.⁷⁴ This praise is indeed no less deserved for the fact that the moral agent acts according to his own nature; Seneca reminds us that though God has sown "divine seeds" in all men, the outcome will be very different: in the "good" they will bear divine fruits, in the "bad" they will die to be replaced by chaff and stubble;⁷⁵ both the "good" and the "bad" react according to their nature, but never for a moment does Seneca doubt that both fully deserve this moral assessment.

In all these texts there seems to be no further individual characterization beyond the good or wise man on one side and the crowd of the *stulti* or *mali* on the other. But we should not forget that Seneca harbored a lively interest for individual character and personality, following in the wake of Panaetius.⁷⁶ Seneca, then, agrees with the Greek Stoics in holding that the "bad" are bound to act badly and the "good" to accomplish good deeds;⁷⁷ but there is a further point, which he takes up and develops. According to Alexander of Aphrodisias,⁷⁸ the main reason for Chrysippus to deny that autonomy consists in being able to choose between opposites was that, if we assume this, all moral action would be abolished, because, though vice and virtue depend on us (in the way sketched *supra*), there is really no such choice: bad men can only act badly and good men can only act well.⁷⁹ What would be lost in that case is praise and blame (which are naturally inherent to virtue and vice), and also suasion and dissuasion.

⁷² Sen. *benef.* 6.21.2: *vir bonus non potest non facere quae facit; non enim erit bonus, nisi fecerit.* Cf. Inwood 1985: 110.

⁷³ Sen. *benef.* 6.21.3: *si necesse est illi velle ob hoc, quia nihil habet melius, quod velit, ipse se cogit; ita, quod tamquam coacto non deberem, tamquam cogenti debeo.* For God, cf. frg. 122 Haase = F 84 Vottero (below, note 80).

⁷⁴ Sen. *epist.* 76.10: *quid est in homine proprium? ratio: haec recta et consummata felicitatem hominis implevit. ergo si omnis res, cum bonum suum perfecit laudabilis est et ad finem naturae suae pervenit, homini autem bonum ratio est, si hanc perfecit laudabilis est et finem naturae suae tetigit.*

⁷⁵ Sen. *epist.* 73.16: *semina in corporibus humanis divina dispersa sunt, quae si bonus cultor excipit, similia origini prodeunt et paria iis ex quibus orta sunt surgunt: si malus, non aliter quam humus sterilis ac palustris necat ac deinde creat purgamenta pro frugibus.*

⁷⁶ Cf. Setaioli 2000: 111–217, 397–408. For Chrysippus, cf. Cic. *fat.* 8 (= SVF II 951).

⁷⁷ Cf. SVF III 110.

⁷⁸ Alex. *Aphr. fat.* 21 (= SVF II 984).

⁷⁹ Cf. Long 1971: 184.

We have seen how the Stoics—and Seneca—saved moral responsibility: though we act according to our nature, we are ourselves the cause of our action: the good man is not forced to act well by an exterior force, but, to borrow Seneca's words, *ipse se cogit*.⁸⁰ But, as we just said, this fragment mentions not merely praise and blame, but also "suasion" and "dissuasion"—*προτροπαί* and *ἀποτροπαί*. In the testimony by Gellius that we have already referred to, Chrysippus is reported as stating that if somebody's bad nature has not been aided by education it will have no way to avoid faults and misdeeds.⁸¹ This implies that the Stoics laid great emphasis on education, in relation to the formation and transformation of one's character.⁸²

As we have remarked at the beginning, the Stoics needed to take man's capability of moral improvement more or less for granted.⁸³ They never doubted that virtue was teachable.⁸⁴ As far as Seneca is concerned, the main goal of his philosophical writing was the moral improvement of both himself and his readers.⁸⁵ He gives an answer to the two questions that, according to Bobzien, remain unanswered in the scanty remains of the Greek Stoics: "whether everyone was considered equally teachable and capable of change, and whether the teachability remains the same at any stage of a person's life."⁸⁶ According to Seneca, philosophical therapy must be attempted in all cases,⁸⁷ and teaching is not the same for everyone and at all stages, though suasion and dissuasion are indeed an indispensable tool.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ Sen. *benef.* 6.21.3 (*supra*, note 73). Cf. frg. 122 Haase = F 84 Vottero: "*ergo*" inquit "*deum non laudabimus, cui naturalis est virtus?*" [...] *Immo laudabimus; quamvis enim naturalis illi sit, sibi illam dedit, quoniam deus ipse natura est.*

⁸¹ Gell. 7.2.8: *si vero sunt [scil. ingenia] aspera et inscita et rudia nullisque bonarum artium adminiculis fulta, etiamsi parvo sive nullo fatalis incommodi conflictu urgeantur, sua tamen scaevitate et voluntario impetu in assidua delicta et in errores se ruunt.*

⁸² Cf. SVF III 225, 366.

⁸³ Bobzien (1998a: 290–301) provides a clear picture of this need as well as of the related philosophical problems.

⁸⁴ Cf., e.g., SVF I 567, III 223.

⁸⁵ Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 239–256.

⁸⁶ Bobzien 1998a: 295.

⁸⁷ Sen. *epist.* 25.2, 29.3, 50.6 (although there are cases in which it proves unsuccessful: *epist.* 94.24 and 31, *clem.* 1.2.2, *dial.* 8 [= *de otio*].3.3). Strategies will vary according to the stages of corruption: cf., e.g., *epist.* 25.1, *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).18.2. Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 239–256.

⁸⁸ The emotional *admonitio* must precede the *institutio* proper, though the former remains necessary all along. Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 239–256.

4.

We have seen that, although we act according to our individual nature, we are morally responsible for our actions. These are the result of accepting the stimulus of an external presentation, i.e., of our assent to it.⁸⁹ But in a determinist system even our assent is determined by fate,⁹⁰ and, as a consequence, so are our actions. This seriously jeopardizes the usefulness and the very meaning of human action and/or willingness to act, if the latter is itself inescapably inscribed in a circle determined not by us as agents, but by fate. It is not surprising, therefore, that the so-called “Idle” or “Lazy Argument” (ἄργος λόγος) was brought to bear against this type of determinism, possibly by the Megarics.⁹¹ It is reported by Origen⁹² and Cicero,⁹³ in approximately these terms: “if it is fated for you to recover from disease, you will, whether or not you call for a doctor; if you are not fated to recover, you will not, whether or not you call for a doctor; it is therefore useless to call for a doctor.” Chrysippus’s rebuttal is recorded by Cicero,⁹⁴ from whom we learn that the Greek master had devised the doctrine of the *confatalia*, according to which our actions are indeed included in fate but are posited as necessary, “co-fated” conditions for the fulfillment of its decrees. In this case we have *fata copulata*, inasmuch as an event is coupled with a necessary condition: calling for a doctor is as fatally preordained as recovering from the disease.⁹⁵ If no co-fated condition is included in a fatal decree, then we have what Cicero calls *fata simplicia*.⁹⁶ The Stoic rebuttal of the “Idle Argument” is found in two more Latin texts: a long scholium by the Servius Danielinus to Virgil’s *Aeneid* and a work by Seneca.⁹⁷ Both

⁸⁹ Cf., e.g., Inwood 1985: 81, and see *supra*, note 66.

⁹⁰ Cf., e.g., *SVF* II 993, 998. Incidentally, as Gourinat (2005b: 234 n. 93) points out, this would make moral improvement philosophically problematic. But the Stoics—and certainly not Seneca—do not seem to have been troubled by the contradictoriness of these two stands. One could observe that with Seneca (and Epictetus) the stress is clearly shifted from the physical and ontological domain to ethics, i.e., from the problem of how assent is produced to the moral worth of the correct attitude and intention, regardless of how it comes about.

⁹¹ Cf. Bobzien 1998a: 180: “there is some reason to think that it may have originated among the Megarics and logicians such as Diodorus Cronus.”

⁹² Orig. *contr. Cels.* 2.20 (= *SVF* II 957): ὁ ἀργὸς καλούμενος λόγος.

⁹³ Cic. *fat.* 28 f. (*ignava ratio*).

⁹⁴ Cic. *fat.* 30 (= *SVF* II 956).

⁹⁵ *Confatalis* corresponds to συγ(καθ)ειμαρμένος: cf. *SVF* II 998 and the texts listed by Bobzien 1998a: 212 n. 93.

⁹⁶ Cf. also *SVF* II 998: ἀπλῶς καθείμαρτο.

⁹⁷ Serv. Dan. *ad Aen.* 4.696, Sen. *nat.* 2.37 f. For both texts, see Setaioli 2004–2005: 13–18. For Seneca, see also Armisen-Marchetti 2000: 207–211, Gourinat 2005b, Setaioli 2006–2007: 360 f.,

conflate fate and conditional prophecy,⁹⁸ but both present clear parallels with Cicero. The Servius Danielinus uses a terminology that is different from Cicero's, but clearly equivalent to it: his *fata denuntiatiua* and *condicionalia* obviously correspond to Cicero's *fata simplicia* and *copulata*,⁹⁹ and in his commentary there are striking similarities with Seneca's treatment of the Etruscan lore concerning lightning and thunderbolts, in which his mention and discussion of the "Idle Argument" is included.¹⁰⁰ If, as I think it likely,¹⁰¹ this exegesis, which is applied by the Latin scholiast to the death of Dido, was originally devised in connection with Homer's verses about Achilles's choice of life¹⁰²—which is referred to in the text of the Servius Danielinus—we must conclude that the Homeric scholiast linked the doctrine of the *confatalia* with freedom of choice and/or decision, rather than with the significance of human action.

Unlike Cicero and the Servius Danielinus, Seneca does not employ strictly technical terms,¹⁰³ but he describes the co-fated conditions as clearly as they do with the verb *adfatum est*, which has been wrongly corrected by some editors.¹⁰⁴ The same idea is also expressed through another word, which has sparked much debate: *suspensa*. Seneca says that some events have been left "hanging" by the gods in such a way that they may take a turn for the

Wildberger 2006: I 328–336. Bobzien 1998a: 180–183 provides a clear picture of the debate, but her treatment of Seneca is marred by serious misunderstandings. See below, note 113.

⁹⁸ Seneca does so more clearly than the scholium, although Bobzien (1998a: 181 n. 6) refers only to the latter in this connection. Cf. Sen. *nat.* 2.38.2, where several predictions are made to be dependent on determinate conditions.

⁹⁹ There is no reason to deny that the scholium reflects Stoic doctrine, as Hine (1981: 369–371) does. Cf. Setaioli 2004–2005: 16 f. for a detailed refutation.

¹⁰⁰ Serv. Dan. *ad Aen.* 8.524 is almost identical to Sen. *nat.* 2.39.1 (classification of thunderbolts). Hine (1981: 379 f.) and Parroni (2002: 521) think that the scholiast drew upon Seneca, which I believe to be very unlikely. Cf. Setaioli 2004–2005: 18 and n. 336.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Setaioli 2004–2005: 16 f.

¹⁰² Hom. *Il.* 9.410–416. Eustathius's commentary on these verses (II, 746, 12–19 van der Valk), though employing no technical terminology, does indeed explain them as a conditional prophecy, also referring to the gods' warning to Aegisthus (Hom. *Od.* 1.35–43) and to Odysseus's companions eating the Sun's cattle and thus forfeiting their return to Ithaca (Hom. *Od.* 1.6–9) as further instances.

¹⁰³ This can be observed very often in Seneca: cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1996a.

¹⁰⁴ Sen. *nat.* 2.38.2: *in illo fati ordine quo patrimonium illi grande promittitur, hoc quoque protinus adfatum est, ut etiam naviget*. Hine (1981: 100 and 377) prints *adfatum* between two *cruces*, as he also does in his Teubner edition of 1996. Parroni (2002: 136) prefers Russell's conjecture *adiectum*. *Adfatum* is rightly preserved by Marino 1996a and Vottero 1989. The passive usage of the verb receives support from Cic. *fat.* 30: *si ita fatum sit "nascetur Oedipus Laio" eqs.*, and offers no real linguistic problem: cf. Setaioli 2004–2005: 16 n. 327. It is actually a very close rendering of the Greek συνειμαρται.

good if expiation rites are performed—a condition itself included in fate.¹⁰⁵ Though many scholars believe that *suspensa* here means “undetermined” or “undecided,”¹⁰⁶ it is clear that what Seneca means is “depending (upon)” or “attached (to)”; in other words, he is referring to Cicero’s *fata copulata*,¹⁰⁷ in which the event is inextricably connected with a co-fated condition. This is supported both by what immediately follows—*ipsum quoque in fato est*—and by Seneca’s linguistic usage.¹⁰⁸

Seneca has the interlocutor formulate the “Idle Argument” in a peculiar way (by resorting to generic propositions about the future),¹⁰⁹ immediately proceeds to declare it false for the *fata copulata*,¹¹⁰ and goes on by making the interlocutor retort that the co-fated condition does not change the determinist picture, since it is also included in fate¹¹¹—an objection that was natural enough for anyone who rejected determinism.¹¹² Seneca must

¹⁰⁵ Sen. nat. 2.37.2: *quaedam a dis immortalibus ita suspensa relictasunt ut in bonum vertant si admotae dis preces fuerint, si vota suscepta: ita non est hoc contra fatum, sed ipsum quoque in fato est.*

¹⁰⁶ So Hine 1981: 369, who, as a consequence, must deny that this position is genuinely Stoic. This is the current interpretation: cf., e.g., Riesco Terrero 1966: 64, Oltramare 1973: I 87, Vottero 1989: 341, Marino 1996a: 115, Parroni 2002: 137. Wildberger 2006: I 332 translates *suspensa* as “in der Schwebe,” but must admit that it really means “von dem Verhalten der Menschen abhängig.”

¹⁰⁷ This is implicitly admitted by Wildberger 2006: I 334 f.; more explicitly by Wildberger 2006: II 932 n. 1522.

¹⁰⁸ Armisen-Marchetti (2000: 210 n. 52) quotes *epist.* 58.8 and 98.1. Frg. 26 Haase = F 61 Vottero is added in Setaioli 2006–2007: 361 n. 227; but many more texts could be quoted: *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*) 15.3, *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*) 2.1, *epist.* 78.13, 101.9, and, most of all, *nat.* 2.45.2: *hic [scil. Iuppiter] est, ex quo suspensa sunt omnia, causa causarum*, to be compared with *benef.* 4.7.2: *ille [scil. deus] est prima omnium causa, ex qua ceterae pendent*. The expression *in suspensio* can mean “deferred” or “postponed” (*dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2] 22.4); for the rest, when *suspensus* is used absolutely it is usually referred to a psychological state of suspense (e.g., *dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*] 2.10, *dial.* 10 [= *brev.*] 12.5, etc.); when it governs a complement, as in the passages quoted above, or a consecutive clause, like in our text, it always means “depending (upon)” or “attached (to).”

¹⁰⁹ Sen. nat. 2.37.3: “*aut futurum*” inquit “*est aut non: si futurum est fiet, etiamsi vota non suscipis; si non est futurum, etiamsi susceperis vota, non fiet.*” However, the reference to the doctor, further down (*nat.* 2.38.4), is a sure sign that Seneca also had the traditional form of the argument in mind.

¹¹⁰ It is clear from Cic. *fat.* 30 that for Chrysippus the “Idle Argument” was valid only for the *fata simplicia*.

¹¹¹ Sen. nat. 2.38.1: “*hoc quoque*” inquit “*ipsum necesse est fato comprehensum sit, ut aut suscipias vota aut non.*”

¹¹² Cic. *fat.* 31 may not be Carneades’s reply to Chrysippus’s refutation of the “Idle Argument,” as maintained by Bobzien 1998a: 231 n. 126; surely, however, these words by Seneca’s interlocutor, though formally reminiscent of Chrysippus’s refutation, are really the traditional objection to any determinism, as we find it expressed in Diogenianus *ap. Eus. Pr. Ev.* 4.3.11 =

admit that the *confatalia* are indeed included in fate—he could not contradict Chrysippus—and finds a way out by resorting to tautology (“what is bound to happen *will* happen”) and postponing the discussion about what is left *in hominis arbitrio*.¹¹³ This term¹¹⁴ possibly shows that Seneca, like the Greek source of the Servius Danielinus, connected the doctrine of the *confatalia* with freedom of choice and decision, rather than (or at least besides) the relevance and moral import of human action—even though, as we have remarked at the beginning, he preferred to postpone this thorny discussion, and never kept his promise to tackle the problem.

It may indeed be granted that in and of itself the doctrine of co-fatedness implies the autonomy of the agent in the same sense as Chrysippus’s image of the cone and the cylinder: although the co-fated conditions are themselves established by fate, they are nevertheless effected by and through us.¹¹⁵ It is hardly possible, however, to elicit this from Seneca’s statement that the haruspex and the doctor are ministers of fate,¹¹⁶ as Wildberger strives to do.¹¹⁷ In this text the stress lies on someone else’s activity, rather than on that of the person involved. Chrysippus¹¹⁸ emphasizes the agent’s effort, e.g., in *calling* for a doctor, but in Seneca he passively receives his healing through the physician’s agency. Seneca does stress the need for an active attitude, but it implies the general acceptance of and cooperation with fate’s plan, in the sense illustrated above, rather than the individual effort directed at acting autonomously for one’s own ends. If fate has established that someone will

SVF II 939 (specifically in relation with precautions suggested by divination, as in Seneca): if we admit determinism, all is ruled by fate and nothing is in our power; cf. Sen. *nat.* 2.38.3: *ista nobis opponi solent, ut probetur nihil voluntati nostrae relictum eqs.*

¹¹³ Bobzien is totally mistaken in distinguishing the lines respectively spoken by Seneca (or the Stoic spokesman) and the interlocutor in *nat.* 2.37.3–2.38.3. The interlocutor’s lines are marked by *inquit*, according to Seneca’s usage; all the rest is spoken by Seneca (or by the Stoic spokesman). Bobzien (1998a: 204) believes the first words of *nat.* 2.38.1 (*supra*, note 111) to be spoken by Seneca and to be the restatement of Chrysippus’s refutation of the “Idle Argument” (she translates *inquit* as “he—i.e., Chrysippus—says”), whereas they are really the standard objection to any determinism (cf. preceding note) spoken by the interlocutor. Besides, Bobzien 1998a: 231 and n. 127 assigns the last words of *nat.* 2.38.2 to the interlocutor, whereas in reality they are spoken by Seneca and continue the series of examples introduced in the preceding lines.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *supra*, notes 5–9.

¹¹⁵ As is clear from SVF II 998 (Diogenianus). Cf. Gourinat 2005b: 234.

¹¹⁶ Sen. *nat.* 2.38.4: *hoc prodest [scil. haruspex], quod fati minister est; sic cum sanitas debeatur fato debetur et medico, quia ad nos beneficium fati per huius manus venit.*

¹¹⁷ Wildberger 2006: I 342.

¹¹⁸ Consistently in Cicero’s (SVF II 956), Origenes’s (SVF II 957), and Diogenianus’s (SVF II 998) reports.

become eloquent provided he studies literature, *we* must teach him:¹¹⁹ here again the fulfillment of the co-fated condition comes through the agency of others, rather than of the party directly involved. Seneca says not that this person must learn, but that he must be taught.¹²⁰

5.

Chrysippus based his idea that all events are determined by fate not merely on the principle of bivalence (every proposition, including those about the future, is either true or false), which falls within the domain of logic,¹²¹ but also on causality, which is part of physics¹²² and is actually the indispensable foundation of the validity of the principle of bivalence.¹²³ Fate is what is true from eternity, but it is also a series of causes, as Seneca too repeatedly remarks.¹²⁴ It is a series of events preordained from eternity, unfolding for us in temporal succession—like the uncoiling of a rope, according to the image preserved by Cicero,¹²⁵ or, in a formulation possibly going back to Posidonius, the flow from eternity of an eternal truth.¹²⁶ Seneca's conception is hardly different: *cursum irrevocabilem ingressa ex destinato fluunt*,¹²⁷ and, as Wildberger observes,¹²⁸ Seneca too assumes that what is fated is true from

¹¹⁹ Sen. nat. 2.38.2: *fatum est ut hic disertus sit, sed si litteras didicerit; at eodem fato continetur ut litteras discat: ideo docendus est.*

¹²⁰ Wildberger 2006: I 337 does not see this nuance. At II 922 n. 1493 she proposes correcting *expiabit* (*varia lectio: expiat*) at nat. 2.38.3: *at hoc quoque in fato est, ut expiet: ideo expiabit to expiet* (jussive subjunctive, following upon the preceding *expiet*), which would stress the agent's direct responsibility for action, against the general posture of the context, as illustrated here.

¹²¹ As already propounded by Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 9, 18a28–19b4, who, however, exempted from this principle the propositions about the future, which are not yet either true or false. For Epicurus's position, cf. Cic. *fat.* 37 f. An overview of the ancient debate can be found in Rist 1969: 112–120.

¹²² Cf. especially Cic. *fat.* 20 f. See the masterly treatment by Sedley 2005b; cf. also Bobzien 1998a: 59–86, Wildberger 2006: I 322–327.

¹²³ As Inwood (1985: 216) rightly points out, in Stoicism “logic, physics, and ethics were all woven together into a virtually seamless fabric.”

¹²⁴ E.g., Sen. *benef.* 4.7.2: *quom fatum nihil aliud sit quam series implexa causarum; epist.* 19.6: *dicimus seriem esse causarum ex quibus nectitur fatum.*

¹²⁵ Cic. *div.* 1.127: *non enim illa quae futura sunt subito exsistunt, sed est quasi rudentis explicatio sic traductio temporis nihil novi efficientis et primum quidque replicantis.*

¹²⁶ Cic. *div.* 1.125: *ea est ex omni aeternitate fluens veritas sempiterna.* These words are included in Posid. F 377 Theiler, whereas they are not attributed to Posidonius by Edelstein-Kidd. Cf. Cic. *nat.* 1.40, 1.55, 3.14.

¹²⁷ Sen. nat. 2.35.2. Cf. Magris 1990: 74.

¹²⁸ Wildberger 2006: I 323.

eternity when he remarks that a true prediction cannot be made invalid by a subsequent one based on a new divinatory sign, because “nothing is truer than truth.”¹²⁹ Possibly, he conflates logic and physics, too, when he states that God “wrote” fate (notice the plural, *fata*) once and for all,¹³⁰ which must be taken to mean that God established (“formulated in writing,” as it were) certain propositions that are for ever true; but we must not forget that God also established the causes: he is the *causa causarum*.¹³¹

But how do logic and physics relate to ethics in this connection for Seneca? As we have seen, the Stoics maintained that granting or withholding assent to external presentations is in our power.¹³² After Seneca, Epictetus connects the capability of “using the presentations”¹³³ with the power of “seeking and declining,”¹³⁴ which, according to him, is a gift bestowed by God upon man. As we shall see, Seneca, like Epictetus, considers the human will to be essentially free.¹³⁵ The opponents of Stoicism had accused Chrysippus of nullifying man’s will,¹³⁶ although terms related to will often appear in the relevant fragments and testimonies.¹³⁷ Space does not permit us to embark on a detailed analysis of these, but we must say something at least about Seneca’s conception of will.

In the Stoic system, will (βούλησις) is one of the εὐπάθειαι typical of the sage.¹³⁸ But, according to Pohlenz,¹³⁹ Seneca opens a breach in Stoic intellectualism by laying stress on the Roman concept of *voluntas*. His position has recently been greatly developed by Zöller, who grounds every man’s freedom to shape his own moral character in the alleged dichotomy inherent both in the cosmos and the soul.¹⁴⁰ Although the limits of his

¹²⁹ Sen. nat. 2.34.2: *vero verius nihil est: si aves futura cecinerunt, non potest hoc auspiciū fulmine irritū fieri, aut non futura cecinerunt.*

¹³⁰ Sen. dial. 1 (= prov.) 5.8: *ille omnium conditor et rector scripsit quidem fata sed sequitur; semper paret, semel iussit* (see below, note 166, for the reduction of God to temporal contingency in this text); and, of course, the very etymology of *fatum* encouraged a Roman Stoic to conceive of fate as a series of uttered propositions. Cf. Pötscher 1978: 418 and n. 103.

¹³¹ Cf. Sen. nat. 2.45.2 (*supra*, note 108), also note 124.

¹³² Cf. SVF II 974–1007.

¹³³ Epict. diatr. 1.1.12: τὴν δύναμιν [...] τὴν χρηστικὴν ταῖς φαντασίαις.

¹³⁴ Epict. diatr. 1.1.12: ὀρεκτικὴν τε καὶ ἐκκλητικὴν.

¹³⁵ Cf., e.g. Epict. diatr. 1.17.28: ἔὰν θέλῃς, ἐλεύθερος εἶ, closely paralleled by Sen. epist. 80.4: *quid opus est ut bonus sis? velle!*; cf. epist. 31.5: *quid votis opus est? fac te ipse felicem.*

¹³⁶ Cf. Cic. fat. 9 (= SVF II 951), Gell. 7.2.5 (= SVF II 1000), Sen. nat. 2.38.3.

¹³⁷ E.g., SVF II 998 (Diogenianus: βούλεσθαι is referred to the effort of the agent in the doctrine of co-fatedness, as *voluntas* in Sen. nat. 2.38.3), Gell. 7.2.8: *voluntario impetu*, 7.2.11: *voluntas*.

¹³⁸ Cf. SVF III 431, 432, 435 (= Sen. epist. 59.2), 437, 438, 517 (= Sen. epist. 95.7).

¹³⁹ Pohlenz 1967: II, 89 f.

¹⁴⁰ Zöller 2003: 231 f. Zöller devotes a whole chapter to Seneca’s alleged psychological

work have been well illustrated by Wildberger¹⁴¹ and his positions are often problematic, we may agree with his statement¹⁴² that in Seneca character shaping and moral improvement are clearly connected with (good) will. It is hardly important, for our purpose, to determine whether will is or is not an autonomous mental faculty in Seneca;¹⁴³ we should rather observe that for him it is hardly a εὐπάθεια of the accomplished sage,¹⁴⁴ but rather a natural endowment that must be trained and improved.

We must be aware of the fact that in Seneca terms like *velle*, *voluntas*, *voluntarius* do not always convey the same meaning.¹⁴⁵ What is important here is the will to improve oneself morally, whose freedom is taken for granted by Seneca. At the lowest moral level, this will may be lacking,¹⁴⁶ but under normal circumstances it does not need to be learned;¹⁴⁷ what can and should be learned is the correct use of will.¹⁴⁸ Will can lack direction,¹⁴⁹ but if properly channeled it becomes essential to moral improvement.¹⁵⁰ At this stage it is already *bona voluntas*, which can be a mere psychological state not yet

dualism (pp. 140–153). For monism vs. dualism in Stoic psychology, see Inwood 1985: 33–37, 131–143, 155–165, 176–180 (about Seneca). Cf. also Inwood 2005a: 23–64 and my review: Setaioli 2007a: 689f. Zöller relies on Sen. *epist.* 71.27, 92.8, *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).8.1–3 to uphold Seneca's psychological dualism. Although I do believe that in Epistle 92 there are elements of dualism (cf. Setaioli, *supra*, p. 246), it should be noticed that in Epistle 92.3 the concept of *voluntas* is connected with the *rational* part of the soul.

¹⁴¹ Wildberger 2006: II 925 n. 1498.

¹⁴² Zöller 2003: 146.

¹⁴³ Cf. Inwood 2005a: 132–156 and Setaioli 2007a: 691f. For a discussion of the rich bibliography, see Zöller 2003: 19–46; also Wildberger 2006: II 924 f. n. 1497.

¹⁴⁴ Even though Seneca envisages this, too: *epist.* 116.1: *cum tibi cupere interdixero, velle permittam*.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Voelke 1973: 162f. Inwood (2005a: 132–156) detaches the investigation of Seneca's concept of will from his use of *velle* and related words. We must indeed be wary of Seneca's use of terminology. At *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).20.6 he criticizes Livy for writing *vir ingenii magni magis quam boni*, on the grounds that goodness and greatness cannot be separated. But at *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*).16.3 he himself says of the Gracchi: *etiam qui bonos viros negaverit magnos fatebitur*.

¹⁴⁶ Sen. *epist.* 116.8: *nolle est in causa, non posse praetenditur*. Clearly, the lack of good will is seen as a free choice. With a different nuance, cf. also Seneca's translation of Cleanthes's verses, *epist.* 107.11 (*fac nolle*: v. 3). Will can also lead to the worst form of slavery (*epist.* 47.17) and impel us to passion (e.g., *dial.* 3 [= *de ira* 1].8.1).

¹⁴⁷ Sen. *epist.* 81.13: *nemo referre gratiam scit nisi sapiens. stultus quoque, utcumque scit et quemadmodum potest, referat; scientia illi potius quam voluntas desit: velle non discitur*. The fool's will is an impulse (caused by a ὁρμητικὴ φαντασία), which is there, but must be perfected, as we shall presently see.

¹⁴⁸ I.e., to which φαντασίαι we should grant our assent. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I 339f.

¹⁴⁹ Sen. *epist.* 21.1: *quid velis nescis, melius probas honesta quam sequeris*; cf. 37.5, 52.1.

¹⁵⁰ Sen. *epist.* 71.36: *magna pars est profectus velle proficere*. Cf. *epist.* 80.4.

having attained *bona mens*,¹⁵¹ but is the necessary condition for attaining it¹⁵² and is still found in those who have already reached that goal.¹⁵³ The next stage is the condition of the man who has greatly progressed on the path of moral improvement, whose will is already fairly unswerving, though not yet perfectly consistent like the sage's.¹⁵⁴ The final stage is the *recta voluntas*, the upright will, which proceeds from an upright mind and unfolds in upright action.¹⁵⁵ This goal can be reached only because the will to progress morally is free and virtue is teachable, as Seneca repeats in this very context.¹⁵⁶ At this point will becomes unalterable: *firma voluntas*.¹⁵⁷ Discussing this latter passage we have seen that this immutability does not destroy the wise man's will¹⁵⁸—it actually makes it perfect.¹⁵⁹ Perfect will is the one that always wills the same, and it is tantamount to wisdom;¹⁶⁰ such is the will not only of the wise man, but also of the gods.¹⁶¹

We may conclude that our earlier remarks were right: the belief in both freedom of will and the meaning of goal-directed activity are necessary assumptions for Seneca in order to carry out his mission as a self-appointed spiritual director aiming at the moral improvement of his addressees as well as of his own self.¹⁶² He could never have accepted the idea that moral teaching and advice—suasion and dissuasion¹⁶³—are useless.

But Seneca's ethics does not bring about any real breach in the Stoic system. When the final stage of the training of will is attained, the wise man's will

¹⁵¹ Sen. *epist.* 72. 9: *habet aliquis bonam voluntatem, habet profectum, sed cui multum desit a summo.*

¹⁵² Sen. *epist.* 16.1: *perseverandum est et adsiduo studio robur addendum, donec bona mens sit quod bona voluntas est.* Baldarotta (1994: 28) misunderstands this passage: "occorre un assiduo impegno ed esercizio perché il pensiero retto e buono (*bona mens*) si tramuti in buona volontà."

¹⁵³ Cf. Sen. *benef.* 4.21.6, 5.3.2.

¹⁵⁴ Sen. *epist.* 35.4: *mutatio voluntatis indicat animum natere [...] non vagatur quod fixum atque fundatum est: istud sapienti contingit, aliquatenus et proficienti provectoque.*

¹⁵⁵ Sen. *epist.* 95.57: *actio recta non erit nisi recta fuerit voluntas; ab hac enim est actio. rursus voluntas non erit recta nisi animus rectus fuerit; ab hoc enim est voluntas.* In Stoic terms, the *recta voluntas* proceeds from the ὀρθὸς λόγος and unfolds in the κατ'ὀρθωμά.

¹⁵⁶ Sen. *epist.* 95.56: *virtus et aliorum scientia est et sui; discendum de ipsa est ut ipsa discatur.*

¹⁵⁷ Sen. *benef.* 6.21.2, a passage we have already discussed.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *supra*, notes 72 f.

¹⁵⁹ Sen. *benef.* 6.21.4. Cf. Zöllner 2003: 220 f.

¹⁶⁰ Sen. *epist.* 20.5: *quid est sapientia? semper idem velle et idem nolle.* At *epist.* 35.4 and 52.1 consistency of will is indicated as a goal.

¹⁶¹ Sen. *benef.* 6.23.1, and the whole context. Cf. *nat.* 1 pr. 3; for *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).5.8 see below, note 166.

¹⁶² Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 239–256 and *supra* in this chapter. Scholars who deny that such was the purpose of Seneca's writing (e.g., Inwood 2005a: 144) miss the basic point of his philosophy.

¹⁶³ The προτροπαί and ἀποτροπαί of SVF II 984. Cf. *supra*, § 3.

is not directed to his own, private improvement any more: it has become one with the will of God on a cosmic scale; both are immutable, because both will the best. Man's freedom has become the same as God's freedom,¹⁶⁴ who cannot but follow what he, as perfect Reason, has established from all eternity. Assimilating oneself to God is indeed the final goal of human life,¹⁶⁵ and, according to Seneca, the promise of philosophy.¹⁶⁶

Man's acceptance of God's will as his own includes putting up with the dark side of fate, which cannot be grasped by the human mind: *τύχη* or *fortuna*.¹⁶⁷ Theoretically, Seneca himself equates it with *fatum* and *natura* as one of the names or aspects of God.¹⁶⁸ In practice, however, *fortuna* and related terms are employed by Seneca in reference to events that are not merely unexpected, but also unreliable and often disagreeable, although the wise man considers them to be "indifferent," literally "making no difference" at the moral level, which is the only one that matters. Seneca's attitude toward *fortuna* goes beyond *καρτερία*, the brave bearing of misfortune, which was one of the subordinate forms of *ἀνδρεία*, fortitude,¹⁶⁹ and is very often defiant. If, in a letter, he quotes Virgil to express the manly acceptance of misfortune,¹⁷⁰ in another he corrects him: if the gods have decided contrary to human expectations, theirs is the better decision.¹⁷¹ As a consequence, *fortuna* is often

¹⁶⁴ Sen. *nat.* 1 *pr.* 3: *necesse est eadem placere ei cui nisi optima placere non possunt, nec ob hoc minus est liber ac potens: ipse est enim necessitas sua; benef.* 6.23.1f. We have seen that, just like God, the wise man too establishes his own necessity: *benef.* 6.21.3 (*supra*, note 73).

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Setaioli 2006–2007: 363, Wildberger 2006: I 271 f.

¹⁶⁶ Sen. *epist.* 48.11: *hoc enim est quod mihi philosophia promittit, ut parem deo faciat*. Man is equipped to reach this goal: *epist.* 31.9. It must be said, however, that not only does Seneca raise man to the level of God, he also occasionally lowers God to the level of man. At *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).5.8 he writes: *ille omnium conditor et rector scripsit quidem fata, sed sequitur; semper paret, semel iussit*. As Canfora (1999: 24) observes, God is thus subjected to the same temporal contingency as man. Wildberger 2006: I 50 (cf. II, 556f. n. 314) tries to explain Seneca's formulation. Cf. also *benef.* 4.32.1, 6.23.3–5. Elsewhere, Seneca unequivocally follows the orthodox conception of God in terms of eternity, not of temporal succession: e.g., *nat.* 2.36 *illius [= dei] divinitati omne praesens sit*; cf. *Cic. fat.* 1.128: *sunt enim omnia, sed tempore absunt*.

¹⁶⁷ For the *τύχη* as ἀδελγος αἰτία cf. *SVF* II 965–973. For the Stoics, of course, mere chance is unthinkable: cf., e.g., Wildberger 2006: I 47 f.

¹⁶⁸ Sen. *benef.* 4.8.3: *sic nunc naturam voca, fatum, fortunam: omnia eiusdem dei nomina sunt varie utentis sua potestate*. Rozelaar (1976: 457) considers this passage to indicate that there is a difference between *fatum* and *fortuna*.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *SVF* III 264, 265, 269, 275. Seneca, of course, has a notion of this too: cf., e.g., *epist.* 65.5, *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).5.7, etc. Baldarotta (1994: 24) considers the term *fortuna* to be a *vox media* in Seneca. As far as *καρτερία* is concerned, the figure of the wise man unconquered by fortune had been introduced long before Seneca: *SVF* I 449 (Persaeus of Citium): ὁ σοφὸς ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἀήττητός ἐστι καὶ ἀδούλωτος κτλ.

¹⁷⁰ Sen. *epist.* 76.33–35, quoting Verg. *Aen.* 6.103–105.

¹⁷¹ Sen. *epist.* 98.5, where Virgil's *dis aliter visum*—*Aen.* 2.428—is corrected to *di melius*.

personified as the enemy with whom the wise man must wage an unrelenting fight.¹⁷² Freedom results from accepting *all* of fate as god's will and our own; we should bravely and freely offer ourselves to fortune as we do to fate.¹⁷³ But perhaps Seneca's agonistic attitude conceals more than a difference between the two—fate and *fortuna*—merely due to the limitations of man's understanding. Chrysippus had taught that good cannot exist without evil, but for him the latter's function is mainly to make the former stand out more clearly.¹⁷⁴ In his famous hymn to Zeus, Cleanthes had claimed that the misdeeds of evil men cannot be laid at God's door.¹⁷⁵ In some fragments of Chrysippus's, however, the presence of evil is explained in different ways, several of which reappear in Seneca. What appears to be bad may really be good in the general economy of the cosmos;¹⁷⁶ or it may be a test for man;¹⁷⁷ and some fragments hint at some limitation of God's power.¹⁷⁸ This reappears several times in Seneca: evil and imperfections are due to God's want of effectiveness. He may be simply following Chrysippus,¹⁷⁹ but the occurrence of the same theme in two letters clearly influenced by Platonism¹⁸⁰ leads us to suspect that non-Stoic ideas may also be at play in this conception. Investigating this aspect exceeds the limits of this chapter, but what is clearly implied is that at times *fortuna* may be an intrinsically irrational element, rather than one whose rationality cannot be grasped by the human mind. If this is so, then man's triumph over *fortuna* is not merely the guarantee of

¹⁷² The masterly treatment by Traina 1976: 9–13 (introd.) may be mentioned in this connection. Cf. also Rozelaar 1976: 169 f., Busch 1961. The texts that might be quoted are countless.

¹⁷³ The two following texts, occurring one shortly after the other in the same work should be placed side by side: Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).4.12: *praebendi fortunae sumus*; 5.8: *quid est boni viri? praebere se fato*. Cf. Niem 2002: 190, 203.

¹⁷⁴ SVF II 1169, 1170, 1181. Cf. Gourinat 2005b: 240.

¹⁷⁵ SVF II 537, p. 238, 13 von Arnim; but God can turn even these misdeeds to the good. Cf. SVF III 1184.

¹⁷⁶ SVF II 1171, 1176, 1181, 1184. Cf. Sen. *epist.* 74.20: *sciatque illa ipsa quibus laedi videtur ad conservationem universi pertinere*; 95.50: [*deos*] *qui humani generis tutelam gerunt interdum <in>curiosi singulorum*; *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).3.1: *universis, quorum maior dis cura quam singulorum est*.

¹⁷⁷ SVF II 1173, 1181. Cf. Seneca's whole *De providentia*.

¹⁷⁸ SVF II 1178, 1182, 1183; cf. 1180.

¹⁷⁹ As assumed by Niem 2002: 86–88, in relation to Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).5.9: *non potest artifex mutare materiam*. At *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).6.6 god himself says: *non poteram vos istis* [the misfortunes] *subducere*. Epict. *diatr.* 1.1.12 has God say the same: οὐκ ἐδυνάμην. At *nat.* 1 *pr.* 16 Seneca envisages the possibility that matter may prevent God from creating perfect beings (cf. SVF II 1170).

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Sen. *epist.* 58.27 f., 65.10 (a peculiar translation of Plat. *Tim.* 29de). See Setaioli 2006–2007: 344–346. Cf. also Dragona-Monachou 1994: 4439, 4442.

his freedom¹⁸¹—just as his defeat entails the most grievous servitude¹⁸²—but also his contribution to the perfection of this world by fully restoring the impaired rationality of the divine plan.¹⁸³ His freedom will then not be limited to himself—being his own, the undisputed master of himself¹⁸⁴—but it will expand to a truly cosmic scale.

6.

Stoicism allowed the split between interiority and exteriority, between man and the transcendent, to be overcome. Man can, of course, demarcate a space of his own within whose boundaries he will be totally free—Seneca is in many ways the philosopher of the inner self; but if we attune our own λόγος to the λόγος of the cosmos, of which ours is part, not only shall we accept the divine plan as our own will, but we shall fulfill our natural goal as rational beings and be at one with God and as free as he is. We shall then experience the exhilarating feeling of being “swept with the cosmos”—*cum universo rapi*.¹⁸⁵

Our life will then be in agreement with the Stoic ideal: “living consistently,” our own will being in perfect and constant unison with God’s. Being good is possible only if our will and action are unalterably directed toward the good.¹⁸⁶ When this goal is reached, the opposition between freedom and determinism becomes totally meaningless—and Seneca never doubted that it was up to us to attain it.

¹⁸¹ Cf., e.g., Sen. *epist.* 51.8f. On this passage, see Lefèvre 1983: 66–68.

¹⁸² Cf. Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).15.3.

¹⁸³ Cf. Setaioli 2006–2007: 365. For a fuller treatment, cf. Setaioli, *infra*, pp. 384–388, 397–401.

¹⁸⁴ Cf., e.g., *epist.* 75.18. See the masterful work by Traina 1987. If one is not in possession of oneself, one will again fall under a grievous servitude (Sen. *nat.* 3 *pr.* 16f.), just as if one is under the sway of *fortuna* (cf. *supra*, note 182). There is no need to assume that expressions like *suum esse* must correspond to the concept of ἐφ’ ἑμῶν, as Wildberger (2006: I 341) does.

¹⁸⁵ Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).5.8.

¹⁸⁶ Cf., e.g., Sen. *epist.* 20.5, 34.4, 35.4, 95.58, 120.10f.

ETHICS IV: WISDOM AND VIRTUE*

Jula Wildberger

In Seneca's prose writings the concepts "wisdom," "virtue," and related ideas are negotiated in a complex system of many coordinates. There are, for example, the debates within the inner circle of philosophy: Seneca and other Stoics defend their views against Epicureans, Peripatetics, Cynics, Academics, Sceptics, and Platonists—or against their fellow Stoics with differing positions.¹

If we regard Stoicism as a practical enterprise, there is the tension between the ideals of a philosophical theory and the real life of ordinary people. This tension pervades Seneca's œuvre and is one of the driving forces behind its dialogical, epistolary, and hortatory form and its focus on friendship, the self, and exemplarity.²

When we look at Seneca as a Roman philosopher, we observe a tension between Stoic conceptions of complete agreement and absolute human perfection, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the Roman discourse of manliness, embodied in the hallowed moral examples of old.³ Yet we also encounter new ideas about a man's excellence that had been developing since the late Republic. During the Neronian period, in particular, male members of the Roman elite found ample encouragement to strive for aesthetic, cultural, or intellectual refinement.⁴ Seneca opposes tendencies to seek status and

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¹ Quite a number of scholars see elements of psychological dualism and Platonism in Seneca's philosophy (discussions in Inwood 1993, Gauly 2004, Bonazzi and Helmig 2007, Harte et al. 2010, and in chapters "Physics I" (Smith, pp. 343–361) and "Physics II" (Gauly, pp. 363–378) of this volume). The outline given here implies that Seneca is not a dualist. On wisdom and virtue in Seneca, see also: Ganss 1952, Cancik and Cancik-Lindemaier 1991, Wyszomirski 1993, Torre 1995, Classen 2000, Isnardi Parente 2000, Cambiano 2001, Russell 2004, Jedan 2009. I have not read Fortner 2002.

² See, e.g., Cancik 1967, Hadot 1969, Inwood 1995 and 1999, Hengelbrock 2000, Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 239–256. I fully agree with Setaioli, who insists that Seneca does not break with orthodox Stoic conceptions, and hope to show more clearly below why the Stoic conception of the good does not admit of an eclectic compromise. All the same, there is a tension between ideal and practice—if only the tension that the ideal may never be fulfilled (Sen. *epist.* 42.1, Brouwer 2002).

³ On moral *exempla* in Seneca, see, in particular *epist.* 24 and 120 and Mayer 1991. I use the word "manliness" and not "masculinity" to capture both connotations of Latin *virtus*: that one is a real man and that one is brave and manly.

⁴ See, e.g., Cain 1993, Edwards 1993, Krostenko 2001.

advancement through conspicuous consumption and pastimes that were associated with femininity and softness.⁵ However, he, too, promotes an innovative model of the active political life a Stoic should lead. Paradoxically, Seneca's Stoic life unfolds in private retreat, in exchanges with friends and readers, outside the traditional spheres for practicing Roman virtues.⁶

It is obvious that not all of these coordinates can be explored within a short chapter. Therefore, I intend to focus on two aspects that I believe to be best suited for fleshing out the peculiarities of Seneca's approach. First, I will try to outline his theoretical stance, both against the backdrop of the Stoic discourse in general and with regard to his engagement with Epicureanism. Second, I will point out how Seneca uses traditional ideals of manliness and also raise the question to what extent this may be more than just a veneer to attract a compatriot audience.⁷

1. THE PHYSICS OF VIRTUE

For a Stoic, speaking about wisdom and virtue means speaking about happiness (εὐδαιμονία), which in Seneca's and Cicero's translation becomes a happy life (*vita beata*).⁸ In this context, Greek Stoics distinguish between the highest good (σκοπός) and the end (τέλος) "for the sake of which everything is done, but which is not itself done for the sake of anything." The end is "to obtain happiness, which is the same as being happy."⁹ It is an incorporeal predicate (κατηγόρημα), an effect caused by the highest good, which is a three-dimensional body.

Seneca is well aware of this difference (e.g., *epist.* 117.1–17)¹⁰ but prefers not to take explicit account of it. He uses the expression "the highest good"

⁵ See, e.g., *nat.* 7.32 and *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).12.

⁶ See, e.g., Williams 2003, Gauly 2004.

⁷ Ganss (1952) and Wyszomirski (1993) offer comprehensive overviews that can be used as supplements to the selective presentation of key elements given in this chapter.

⁸ Görler 1996: 163. The change was due to aesthetic reasons (Cic. *nat.* 1.95, Quint. *inst.* 8.3.32), but it reflects well the particular Stoic quality of happiness. It is the good *life* and thus an activity (see, e.g., Sen. *epist.* 67.7), not just a desirable emotion or a state like Epicurean freedom from pain. Although the Stoics too ascribed a set of special "affective responses" to their sage (see M. Graver, *supra*, pp. 257–275), they regarded these not as essential features of happiness, but only as a concomitant positive effect of it (compare *epist.* 59.16).

⁹ Ar. *Did.* in Stob. 2, p. 77 f. Wachsmuth, trans. Long and Sedley 1987 (63A1). See also p. 76, lines 16–23.

¹⁰ In this letter, Seneca presents a complex analysis of the difference between *sapere* and *sapientia*. Detailed discussions are to be found in Cooper 2004: 324–332, Wildberger 2006: 161–178, Inwood 2007a: 288–301; see also Wyszomirski 1991.

(*summum bonum*) indiscriminately for both the highest good and end,¹¹ as in the following passage:

[...] that there is completed virtue (*perfecta virtus*), an evenness and continuity of a life that is in harmony with itself throughout everything, something which cannot happen unless one attains knowledge about things (*rerum scientia*) and a systematic method (*ars*) by means of which [such] knowledge about human and divine things can be acquired. This is the highest good.¹²

After describing the Stoic end, Seneca refers back to what he calls *summum bonum* with the ambiguous demonstrative pronoun “this” (*hoc*). The reader cannot decide whether the pronoun’s referents are the complete subordinate clauses that contain the descriptions of the highest good or only the subjects of the clauses, i.e., whether the thing called *summum bonum* consists of incorporeal predicates such as “having completed virtue” and “attaining knowledge” or of bodies, to which a Stoic refers when using nouns like “virtue” or “knowledge.”

As so often, Seneca’s terminological looseness exploits a peculiarity of the Stoic system with surprising precision. The pronoun “this” can very well refer to both highest good and end because the one cannot occur without the other. This is a consequence of two distinctive features of the Stoic theory of causation. First, the Stoics distinguish a particular class of incorporeal things, the sayables (*λεκτά*), that breach the gulf between language and the physical world. Predicates are the most basic form of sayable. If they actually belong to a body, e.g., the predicate “being wise,” which belongs to a person who actually is wise, they are at the same time effects.¹³ Second, orthodox Stoics defended a rigorously reductionist theory of causation, acknowledging only one type of cause: the efficient cause that has its effect through physical contact, by touching the body on which it has its effect.¹⁴ This means that effects can only obtain as long as a cause for them is physically present. Accordingly, the reason why someone has a particular good is the physical presence of that good itself. The predicates “having virtue” or “being virtuous”

¹¹ For the technical sense of *summum bonum*, see, e.g., *epist.* 9.1, 21.4, 66.45, and *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*) *passim*. The Ciceronian term *finis* is rarely used in this sense, and usually with a clarifying attribute: *epist.* 71.4 and 95.45: *finis summi boni*; *epist.* 78.25: *finis bonorum ac malorum*; 76.10: *naturae suae*; *epist.* 124.23: *suus finis*; *epist.* 52.4 (not quite in a technical sense); *epist.* 93.8: *maximus finis* (playing with the frequent use of *finis* in the sense of death).

¹² Sen. *epist.* 31.8. Unless indicated otherwise, translations are my own.

¹³ Ar. *Did.* 18 in Stob. 1, p. 138f. Wachsmuth; see also Mansfeld 2001a and 2001b.

¹⁴ Seneca discusses causation in Epistle 65, where he defends Stoic reductionism (see also the discussion by Gauly, *infra*, pp. 363–378). On the necessity of physical contact see Sen. *epist.* 106.8, 117.7, 117.10, Wildberger 2006: 13 f.

are caused by a virtue that is physically present within the person in question. A wise person is wise because a body, a wisdom, is active in that person as the cause of effects such as “is wise” or “acts wisely.”¹⁵

While, for the reasons indicated, the distinction between corporeal highest good and incorporeal end might not be of prime importance for understanding Stoic ethics, it is vital to keep in mind that a Stoic, when talking about virtue, wisdom, or the good life, does not discuss just a set of abstract rules or an ideal image but a certain class of three-dimensional bodies. Virtue is a qualitative state, and, for a Stoic, a qualitative state is the same as a body in a qualitative state. In the case of virtue, this body is the mind. When discussing Stoic virtue, one is discussing tokens of perfectly developed rational minds.

[...] virtue is nothing else but the mind in a certain state.¹⁶

Virtue is an unintensifiable disposition in agreement (διάθεσις ὁμολογουμένη). [...] And happiness lies in virtue, inasmuch as virtue is the soul so made as to produce the agreement of one's whole life.¹⁷

In the second of the two definitions quoted above, the genus of virtue is given as “unintensifiable disposition” (διάθεσις). Unintensifiable dispositions are a particular class of qualitative state that “do not admit intensification or relaxation” and cannot become more or less what they are. The example given in our source¹⁸ is the disposition “straightness” of a stick. If you bend a stick, it becomes curved, not less straight: it loses its disposition “straightness” (εὐθύτης) altogether. Playing with the polysemy of the Latin word *rectus*, which means “straight” (εὐθύς) as well as “right” (ὀρθός), Seneca uses the same example to illustrate this central feature that distinguishes the Stoic conception of virtue from those of other schools, namely that, as an unintensifiable disposition, virtue is something absolute, either completely and perfectly present or not present at all.

¹⁵ Ar. Did. 18 in Stob. 1, p. 138, lines 16–22 Wachsmuth (report of Zeno's views).

¹⁶ Sen. *epist.* 113.2: *virtus autem nihil aliud est quam animus quodammodo se habens*. A Greek version of the same idea (S. Emp. *adv. math.* 11.23) indicates that *animus* must be the leading part of the soul in this case. The leading part of rational beings is called “mind” (διάνοια). In Epistle 113.2 Seneca reports other Stoics' arguments that virtue, being a human (or divine) mind, must be an animal. Seneca challenges this view in this letter. Yet, in Epistle 113.7, while playing the role of an interlocutor to his Stoic opponent, he accepts the quoted statement as true and identifies “the mind disposed in a certain manner” with “a qualitative state (*habitus*) of the mind and a certain power (*vis*).” (For Seneca's solution to the question see Wildberger 2006: 90f., Inwood 2007a: 286.) The mind itself is defined as *spiritus quodammodo se habens* in *epist.* 50.6. See further Smith, *infra*, pp. 343–361.

¹⁷ Diog. Laert. 7.89, trans. Gerson and Inwood (II-94), slightly altered.

¹⁸ Simpl. in *Cat.* p. 237f. Kalbfleisch. The quotation is from p. 237, lines 30f.

[...] that only this is a good: what is honorable; that this thing cannot be slackened or intensified, no more than you would bend the ruler (*regula*) generally used to test whether something is straight (*rectum*). Whatever you change in it is a violation of its straightness. The same we will therefore say about virtue: virtue, too, is straight/right (*recta*) and does not admit bending. (*epist.* 71.19 f.)

Taken for itself, the image of the ruler is misleading. One might mistake straightness for stiffness and immobility. Yet the Stoic conception of an unintensifiable disposition does not exclude qualitative change. Having described the kind of mind that is a virtue (*epist.* 66.6), Seneca distinguishes between the different qualities and movements of such a mind and its absolute excellence and goodness, any change of which would destroy the virtuous disposition of that mind.

On the other hand, there are many types of virtue, which unfold themselves according to the various situations in life and different actions. Virtue itself becomes neither smaller nor greater. For the highest good cannot decrease, and virtue cannot go back [scil. to a previous state of imperfection]; instead it transforms itself into another quality all the time, adapting itself to the shape of actions which it is about to perform. [...] Therefore, the power and greatness of virtue cannot rise any further, as there is no increase to what is the greatest. Nowhere will you find something that is straighter than what is straight (*rectius recto*), just as nothing is truer than what is true or more balanced than what is balanced out. (*epist.* 66.7 f.)

With statements such as these Seneca tries to explain the distinctive quality of a Stoic good as something that can neither be intensified nor diminished. Arguably, this quality can be called the theoretical core of Stoic ethics, and Seneca accords it due prominence by making it the subject of the first and, at the same time, most extensive technical discussion of a Stoic tenet in the *Epistulae morales*.¹⁹

2. VIRTUE, HAPPINESS, AND NATURE

Like other Stoics, Seneca insists that there are certain absolute goods with absolute value, belonging to a category of their own and completely different from what they call “preferred indifferents” (*ἀδιάφορα προηγμένα*), such as good health, a long life, intelligence, or safety and sustenance. These

¹⁹ With 13 Oxford pages, Epistle 66 on the equality of Stoic goods is longer than any letter before it. The debate continues, in particular in Epistles 67, 71, 74, and 76. Three of these (66, 71, and 76) are discussed in Inwood 2007a. On Epistle 66, see also Hachmann 2006.

indifferents have some relative value, which can be intensified and of which there can be more or less, according to the circumstances in which they become available for choice (ἐκλέγειν) among various alternatives.²⁰ But only virtue is to be sought (αἰρεῖσθαι) under all circumstances and without any reservation or qualification.²¹ The value of virtue is always the same and of such a different nature that Stoics contend that virtue is not only sufficient to achieve happiness but the only thing that makes a person happy.

Even in the short definitions of the Stoic end, which we find in doxographic writings, the close connection between virtue and happiness, i.e., the good life, is evident. The following is the most extensive doxography we have of early Stoic definitions and accounts of the end:²²

Therefore, Zeno in his book *On the nature of man* was the first to say that living in agreement with nature (ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν) is the end, which is living in accordance with virtue (κατ' ἀρετήν). For nature leads us toward virtue. So, too, Cleanthes, in his book *On pleasure*, and Posidonius and Hecato, in their books *On ends*.

Further, living in accordance with virtue is equivalent to living in accordance with experience of what happens to/by nature, as Chrysippus says in *On Ends*, Book 1. For our own natures are shares (μερῇ) of the nature of the whole. Therefore, living following the lead of nature (ἀκολουθῶς τῇ φύσει) comes to be the end, which is in accordance with the nature of oneself and that of the whole, engaging in no activity usually forbidden by the universal law, which is the right reason pervading everything and identical to Zeus, who himself is identical with the director of the administration of existing things. And the virtue of the happy man and his good flow of life are just this: always doing everything on the basis of a concordance with the divinity (δαίμων) that is with each man [i.e., his own divine mind] with²³ the volition of the administrator of the whole.²⁴

The text distinguishes clearly between a foundational definition introduced by Zeno and later developments and explications that seem to go back to Chrysippus. In Seneca we find reflections of both: “living in agreement with nature” is expressed with various composite forms of *sentire*, e.g., *naturae assentiri*. Chrysippus’s “living according to the lead of nature” is rendered most closely with *naturam sequi*.²⁵

²⁰ See, e.g., Diog. Laert. 7.104f., Sen. *epist.* 31.6.

²¹ On the reservation with which the sage selects indifferents, see Ar. Did. in Stob. 2, p. 115 Wachsmuth, Wildberger 2006: 273 with 871 n. 1324.

²² An important parallel account is given by Ar. Did. in Stob. 2, p. 75f. Wachsmuth.

²³ The Greek preposition πρὸς with the accusative indicates that the divinity that is within each man is attuning itself to the volition of the administrator and not the other way around.

²⁴ Diog. Laert. 7.87f., trans. Long and Sedley 1987 (63C1–4), with alteration.

²⁵ The reason for this change of terminology, from agreement to following a lead, is

The Stoic happy life is a virtuous life. As we learn from the first part of the quoted passage, this is so because the happy life is a life in agreement with nature, while nature itself leads human beings toward virtue. According to Chrysippus's influential discussion, which is summarized in the second part of the quoted passage, the word "nature" in the definition of the end refers to two things: to the nature of the whole, i.e., the principle God²⁶ in a certain function, and to the individual nature of every single human being.

When using the term "nature" to refer to the principle God, or shares of this principle that constitute individual bodies within the cosmos, Stoics emphasize that the principle God, or the share of it, is a life form, i.e., something that is moving itself out of itself in an ordered way and is able to give birth to things that are similar to itself. Accordingly, individual natures, which are such procreated things, behave in the same manner as the natures from which they were procreated (Diog. Laert. 7.148). A nature is a body that has an inherent aim and drives the living being to goal-directed movements. The Stoic concept of nature is what comes closest to our modern concept of life. We might also say that the aim inherent in a nature is a biological function. Each life form has a share of God, a nature of a particular kind, and with this nature it has its particular biological function. To perform this function is to live according to one's own nature, and the life form that is performing it to perfection has attained the kind of virtue accessible to that class of life forms and thus its highest possible good.²⁷

That this holds true of the human good as well is enhanced in the definitions given by Panaetius (*frag.* 96 van Straaten) and anonymous post-Poseidonian Stoics:

In addition to these men [scil. earlier Stoics] Panaetius declared the end to be "living in accordance with the tendencies bestowed on us by nature." [...] Some of the later Stoics represented it as follows: "The end is living in agreement with the constitution of man."²⁸

The various species and classes of living beings on earth—plants, beasts, humans—all have their particular form of perfection, their *propria virtus*, as Seneca calls it (*epist.* 41.7). Now, human nature is rational. "And since reason

explained in Wildberger 2006: 273f. For Senecan translations of the different terms, see Wildberger 2006: 872–874 n. 1325.

²⁶ In modern discussions, this principle is often called "Logos" by one of its other appellations; in a wider sense, the word "god" is also used to refer to the cosmos as a whole.

²⁷ For further details and Seneca's as well as Hierocles's discussions of *οὐκ ἐξ ἑωστος* ("appropriation"), see Smith, *infra*, pp. 343–361, and Bees 2004.

²⁸ Clem. Al. *strom.* 2.21.129.4f., trans. Long and Sedley 1987 (63J1. 3).

[...] has been bestowed on rational beings, to live correctly in accordance with reason comes to be natural for them. For reason supervenes as the craftsman of impulse"²⁹—impulse being the highest faculty of the nature of beasts. Thus, like his fellow Stoics, Seneca conceives of human virtue as a state at the top of a hierarchy of natural functions:

Praise in a man what is his very own, what can neither be taken away nor given to him, what is particular to man and his very own possession (*proprium*). You ask what it is? It's the mind and perfected reason within this mind. Man is a rational animal. Therefore, that which is good for him reaches its highest degree of perfection once he has completed what he was born for.³⁰

Their own natures lead human beings toward virtue (Diog. Laert. 7.88) by setting inherent goals for themselves. According to its nature, every living being has some things it can do, some biological faculties and functions, and it is part of that nature that the living being develop these faculties and actually perform the functions it is made for. In man, this constitutes the faculty "reason" and the functions that derive from this faculty. Reason is something that humans share with the gods and the principle God; it is the highest faculty any nature can have. Humans are created by God to behave in the same manner as the nature from which they were created, i.e., God.³¹ This is what the happy and virtuous man does when he always acts in such a way as to achieve concordance of his own divine mind "with the volition of the administrator of the whole" (Chrysippus in Diog. Laert. 7.88), and it is also what Seneca is talking about when he says:

"What is reason, then?"—The imitation of Nature.—"And what is man's highest good?"—To behave according to the volition of Nature. (*epist.* 66.39)

3. VIRTUE AND WISDOM

The biological functions—in Stoic terms, the proper functions (*καθήκοντα*)—of humans and beasts are different because their highest faculties are different. This is why human beings should not seek examples for their behavior in the animal world, "when you have at your disposal the divine cosmos, which man, alone of all animals, can understand in order alone to imitate it."³² Passages such as this one show the close connection between

²⁹ Diog. Laert. 7.86, trans. Long and Sedley 1987 (57A5).

³⁰ Sen. *epist.* 41.8; compare, e.g., *epist.* 76.10, 124.23.

³¹ A more detailed account of this is given in Wildberger 2006: 225–231.

³² Sen. *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).16.2, trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995.

virtue and knowledge both for Seneca and for the Stoics in general. If one is to follow “the volition of the administrator of the whole,” one must know what that administrator wants.³³ And if one is to act rationally in accordance with one’s own nature, one must have a correct understanding of that nature, too.

It is therefore not surprising that the four cardinal virtues (justice, wisdom, self-control, and courage) were defined as knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of certain fields of human action.³⁴ Seneca, too, defines one of them, courage, as knowledge (*scientia*) of dangers and of what is good and bad (*benef.* 2.34.3, *epist.* 85.28). However, in a striking passage in Epistle 90, he goes far beyond any extant statement by any other Stoic. Whereas the traditional account assumes that, in principle, every human being can develop into a sage, Seneca explicitly denies that early man could have been in possession of real virtues.

They were innocent because of their ignorance of things. It makes a big difference whether someone does not want to do wrong or does not know how. They lacked justice, they lacked practical wisdom, they lacked self-control and courage. Their primitive life had some aspects that were similar to these virtues. Virtue [itself] can only be achieved by a mind that has been instructed, thoroughly taught, and brought to the highest point [scil. of complete perfection] by means of continuous training. (*epist.* 90.46)

At that primitive time, when philosophy had still to be invented (compare 90.1), when there was no “systematic method by means of which knowledge about human and divine things [could] be acquired” (*epist.* 31.8), it was not yet possible to develop in oneself the intricate technical knowledge of which a virtue consists. This, at least, is Seneca’s view: the very same intellectual progress that teaches human beings vices like greed and injustice is also the necessary prerequisite for real goodness.

Stoic knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is an exactly defined epistemic state: it is a knowledge that can neither be lost nor changed.³⁵ The same is true of the knowledge (*scientia*) that is virtue, according to Seneca. In spite of its length, the following passage is quoted in full because it also shows that the knowledge that constitutes virtue is not purely contemplative but has a practical impact: it is knowledge about values, a knowledge that transforms the mind and not only shapes but determines its volitions. Like Socrates

³³ Chrysippus in Diog. Laert. 7.88. See also Menn 1995 and, more generally, Küppers 1996.

³⁴ See, e.g., Ar. Did. in Stob. 2, p. 59, lines 7–11 Wachsmuth. There, practical wisdom is defined as “knowledge of what to do and what not to do and what is neither [scil. something to do or not to do], or as knowledge of good things and bad things and of what is neither for an animal that is by its nature a political animal and rational.” The definition of courage is “knowledge of what is terrible and not terrible and what is neither.”

³⁵ Ar. Did. in Stob. 2, p. 73, lines 19–23 Wachsmuth.

and like his fellow Stoics, Seneca is clearly an intellectualist. For him this means that one must not only practice ethical behavior but seriously *study* philosophy in order to become a good person.

Virtue is knowledge about other [things and people] and about oneself. One must learn something about virtue in order to learn virtue itself. An action will not be right (*recta*) unless volition has been set right. For action comes from volition (*voluntas*). Volition, in turn, will not be right unless the disposition of the mind (*habitus animi*) has been set right. For volition comes from that disposition. Further, the disposition of a mind will not be in the best possible state unless it has learned the laws of life as a whole and worked out in detail what is to be judged about each thing, unless it has verified [its understanding of] things. Peace of mind (*tranquillitas*) can only be achieved by those who have acquired immutable and certain judgment. (*epist.* 95.56)

The virtuous disposition from which virtuous action can arise is a mind that possesses knowledge. This knowledge is, by definition, immutable and true. Its content is variously indicated, either as knowledge of things (e.g., *epist.* 31.6) or of “things divine and human,” i.e., the subjects studied by philosophy (e.g., *epist.* 31.8, 74.29, 89.5), or as knowledge of what is good or bad: “By one thing only the mind reaches perfection: through unchangeable knowledge of good things and bad things” (*epist.* 88.28).

4. FORMS OF AGREEMENT WITH NATURE

In descriptions of the good life Seneca sometimes presents wisdom as a necessary condition for happiness. At other places he directly identifies wisdom with a life in agreement with nature, e.g., in the following passage from *De vita beata*. With its reference to a universal law that is to be [scil. understood and] followed, it is reminiscent of Chrysippus’s description of the end (Diog. Laert. 7.88).

In the meantime—this is a point on which all Stoics agree—I assent to the nature of all things; never to deviate from it and to shape oneself according to its law and example, this is wisdom. The happy life, then, is a life in accordance with one’s own nature [...]
(*dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*] 3.3)

Like Chrysippus, Seneca presents the highest good in the quoted passage as a life in agreement with both one’s own nature and the nature of all things. It is striking how abruptly he moves from one to the other, as if the connection between the two were completely obvious.³⁶ He evidently

³⁶ This is true even if the particle *ergo* has only transitional force.

expected his readers to supply an explanation such as the one given by Chrysippus, namely that our individual natures are parts of the nature of all things.

In the following paragraphs (*dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*].3.3–15.4), in which Seneca proposes no fewer than eleven further definitions and descriptions of the happy life, agreement with the nature of all things is never mentioned again.³⁷ To some extent, this can be explained by the fact that the passage is a sustained argument against the Epicurean position according to which virtue is only a means to achieve pleasure, pleasure itself being the real end. Seneca wishes to beat the Epicureans at their own game, arguing, as far as possible, on the basis of concepts that are acceptable to both Stoics and Epicureans. Living in agreement with one's own nature could be understood by an Epicurean as a way of living a pleasurable life. But Epicurean theology does not admit the idea that there is a universal nature that one should agree with.

However, at the end of the passage, universal agreement returns in a form that is frequent in Seneca but, as far as I know, not attested in quite this manner for any Stoic before him. The happy person must follow God as a soldier obeys his general, and in particular those commands that bid him suffer physical pain, loss, and death.³⁸ He must “obey the orders of God (*deo parere*) and cheerfully take upon himself whatever happens to him, never complain about fate, always interpret his own misfortunes in a charitable way” (*dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*].15.4).

Agreement with the nature of all things often has this subjective ring in Seneca. The relationship between God and man is personalized. “Living according to the lead of nature” becomes “following God” (*deum sequi*; e.g., *epist.* 96.2) and “obeying God” (e.g., also *epist.* 71.16). The sage follows God like a person.³⁹ God is a general who gives orders (*epist.* 107.9f.), a father, and a friend (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].1.5f.). Human life is seen from within, from the perspective of the sufferer who is hurt or tempted and bravely bears his lot as something assigned to him.

Never did that fully developed man who had achieved virtue say anything bad about Fortune, never did he react to an incident with despondency; believing that he was a citizen of the whole world, and its soldier, too, he submitted to all trials as if they were orders given to him. Whatever happened, he did not

³⁷ See also de Pietro (forthcoming).

³⁸ Compare, e.g., *epist.* 71.16, 76.23; further references Wildberger 2006: 875 n. 1332, 839 n. 1228. Similar imagery is to be found in Epictetus (Long 2002: 168f.).

³⁹ Sen. *epist.* 107.11, Seneca's famous adaptation of Cleanthes's prayer to Zeus and Fate (Epict. *ench.* 53.1 = *SVF* 1.527). Only Seneca calls God *parens*. See also, e.g., *epist.* 104.23, where the human mind appears like a child trying to keep pace with the big person it follows.

turn away from it as if it were something bad and brought upon him by chance but accepted it as a personal assignment. "Whatever this is like," he said, "it's mine: it's rough, it's hard, so let's bend to the task!" (epist. 120.12)

More rarely, Seneca assumes a cosmic perspective, letting the virtuous mind soar high above human affairs in a vision of how insignificant all this is. The human mind thus elevated realizes that the realm of all nature is its true abode, that it came into being to acquire knowledge about God and, thus, its own greatness as well (Sen. nat. 1 pr. 6–17).⁴⁰

It is interesting to compare such passages with the beginning of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, Book 2, where an Epicurean looks down on the struggles and unnatural desires of his contemporaries.⁴¹ The Epicurean feels pleasure because he has arrived at a true understanding of human affairs, or rather his own affairs, and knows that he need not suffer either pain or fear; *he* himself is in a godlike state (Lucr. 2.8), and knowledge about the natural world outside him is just a means to achieve this aim of perpetual bliss (Lucr. 2.61). In Seneca, too, the study of nature helps to develop the greatness of mind that is necessary to withstand the lures and assaults of Fortune.⁴² Nevertheless, this study is also an aim in itself, something to be sought for its own sake. Wisdom is more than understanding your own nature and how its needs can be satisfied. For Seneca, as well as for other Stoics, wisdom is knowledge of *both* divine and human affairs.⁴³

5. THE INTEGRATION OF EPICUREAN FEATURES

All the same, Seneca does integrate Epicurean features into his portrait of the happy person. And this, too, may be one of his original contributions to the Stoic discourse.⁴⁴ However, Epicurean spoils are always either perfectly compatible with Stoicism or modified by Seneca in such a way as to suit the Stoic system. One of them is the idea of a limit, a *finis*: the highest good is conceived of as an end where all wishing comes to a halt because a person

⁴⁰ See also, e.g., *epist.* 65.15–21, 102.21f., Williams 2012 and Gauly, *infra*, pp. 363–378.

⁴¹ Lucretian influences on Seneca are discussed, e.g., in Guillemin 1952, La Penna 1994, Ronnick 1995, and Althoff 2005.

⁴² E.g., Sen. *epist.* 117.19, 58.26–29, Hadot 1969: 251–254, Gigon 1991.

⁴³ Sen. *epist.* 31.8 (quoted *supra*), *epist.* 89.5; compare, e.g., Aëtius 1 pr. 2.

⁴⁴ Seneca himself highlights how unusual it is for a Stoic to turn to Epicureans for instruction: *epist.* 2.5, 12.11. On Epicurus in Seneca, see Hermes 1951, Setaioli 1988, and, e.g., Mutschmann 1915, Schottlaender 1955, Maso 1979–1980, Setaioli 1997b, Grilli 1998, Graver (forthcoming) and Wildberger (forthcoming).

has achieved all there is to achieve (*epist.* 15.11): “Set yourself an end/limit (*finem*) that you cannot surpass, not even if you wanted to.”

Yet, whereas the Epicurean limits his desires by reducing them to what is necessary and natural, Seneca limits human desires by redirecting them toward what is truly good and what can be achieved by the mind on its own. Like Epicurus, Seneca can praise the wealth that is gained by limiting oneself to the fulfillment of a few elementary natural desires (*epist.* 4.10 f.) and contrast such natural desires with the insatiable desires arising from wrong opinions (*epist.* 16.9): “Natural desires are limited (*finita*). Those arising from a wrong opinion have nowhere to stop. Nothing marks the boundary of what is wrong.” Nevertheless, Seneca retains the crucial difference between Stoicism and Epicureanism: the Epicurean limit is reached quantitatively with a surplus of pleasure or the complete removal of pain; the Stoic limit can only be achieved by realizing that a human being needs a different quality of good. It is not a sufficient quantity of pleasure or other indifferents that makes a Stoic happy. Like an Epicurean, a Stoic may—as a first step—reduce his desires to a natural minimum that can easily be satisfied under most circumstances (e.g., Sen. *epist.* 15.11, 20.7), but this is not enough. The recommendation to “reduce yourself to small things from which you cannot fall” (Sen. *epist.* 20.7) is coupled with the urgent advice to give up *all* former wishes and hopes, even those for small things (*epist.* 45.10–12, 110.18–20), and strive for one thing only: “to be content with oneself and the goods that grow within oneself.”⁴⁵

What the Stoic is striving for is to understand his own nature, i.e., the thing he is made to be: a man with perfect reason. He needs this self-knowledge in order to achieve the only thing that can make him happy: to be what he is by nature. This is why the Stoic sage, who lives in agreement with his nature, needs nothing apart from himself. He does not want anything other than to be what he is, and he is content with himself because he has realized that he himself, i.e., his perfect, virtuous mind, is the best thing he can ever have. This is the condition that Seneca wishes Lucilius to achieve. Undisturbed by erroneous desires and fears of the wrong things he shall enjoy what is really good for him: himself.

I wish you that you might become available to yourself, that your mind, which is now agitated by wandering thoughts, might finally come to a halt and assume a stable position, that it begins to like itself and that, after understanding what

⁴⁵ Sen. *epist.* 20.7; compare *epist.* 9 and Evenepoel 2007. Seneca’s awareness of the theoretical differences becomes evident also in Epistle 118, where he offers a discussion of quantitative change that becomes qualitative; see Schmidt 1960.

the true goods are (which are obtained as soon as they are understood), it may no longer need an addition to its lifetime. (*epist.* 32.5).

Another adaptation of Epicurean ideas is the emphasis on the serenity and tranquility of the perfect mind. This is reminiscent of the smooth, level, and pleasurable movements in the soul of the Epicurean sage who is in a state of inperurbedness (ἀταραξία).⁴⁶ A related phenomenon is Seneca's stressing the joy (*gaudium*) of the sage.⁴⁷ Yet again, he takes care to point out that this joy is the good feeling (εὐπάθεια) that the Stoic sage has when he perceives the presence of a good and that is in stark contrast to the worthless elation of a fool (*epist.* 59.1f.). Finally, as Seneca takes equal care to stress, even this Stoic joy is not the end humans should be aiming for; it is only something that follows as a welcome consequence once the end has been reached (*epist.* 59.16, *dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*].9.2).

One other feature of the Senecan sage might owe something to Epicureanism: the Stoic sage is a social animal, and he would not be perfect without social virtues like justice and the knowledge that he is part of a wider community. In Seneca, however, this Stoic sage often shows features of a more private kindness.⁴⁸ The natural environment of the Senecan sage seems to be the world of personal friendship rather than the political state. Given the importance of friendship within the Epicurean community, it is significant that when Seneca first introduces his own Stoic sage in Epistle 9, it is to show that *his* sage is a much better friend than any Epicurean ever could be.

6. INDIFFERENTS AND THE END: ACCORDING TO NATURE VS. IN AGREEMENT WITH NATURE

Most frequently, however, the sage is presented by Seneca as a complete world in and of himself, like an impervious sphere. All that he does not wish to admit bounces off him without lasting effect.⁴⁹ This state of self-contained success and invincibility is also described as liberation from the slavery suffered by those who are obsessed with their own body and the external things that Stoics regarded as indifferents with only relative value or

⁴⁶ For example, in Epistle 95.46 (quoted *supra*); see also Epistle 92.3. 6 (on the related concept of ἀσχηστία = "undisturbedness"), Hadot 1969: 126–141, and on tranquillity in general Striker 1996: 183–195.

⁴⁷ Sen. *epist.* 4.1f., 23.2f., 27.3, 59.1f., 59.14–16.

⁴⁸ E.g., *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).4.2, *epist.* 115.13f. See also Ganss 1952: 62–83 and Gallina 1997–1998.

⁴⁹ *Epist.* 9.2, 53.12, *dial.* 2 (= *const.*).3.5, Wildberger 2006: 934 f. n. 1533.

non-value.⁵⁰ What such a person has learned is the fundamental difference between “according to nature” (κατὰ φύσιν) and “in agreement with nature” (ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει).⁵¹ Humans should select preferred indifferents not just because it is natural, i.e., according to nature, for humans to select them, but because selecting what is natural is in agreement with nature. The sage does not select preferred indifferents for their own sake, because they would be valuable for him by themselves. He selects them because a consistent selection of what is according to nature will allow him to lead a consistent life, in agreement with nature, and thus a good life (e.g., *epist.* 92.11–13).

This point is highlighted in the definitions that some of Chrysippus's successors in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC had proposed of the Stoic end.

Diogenes [of Babylon]: “reasoning well in the selection (ἐκλογή) and dissection of things in accordance with nature;”

Archedemos: “to live [perfectly] completing all proper functions (καθήκοντα);”

Antipater: “to live continuously selecting things in accordance with nature and dissecting things contrary to nature.”

He also frequently rendered it thus: “to do everything in one's power continuously and undeviatingly with a view to obtaining the predominating things which accord with nature.”⁵²

The things in accordance with nature in these definitions are indifferents, not goods. For the Stoics quoted here, the highest good, and thus virtue, consists in the perfect and incessant activity suitable for obtaining indifferents with some positive value and avoiding indifferents with some disvalue.

These definitions were developed in a debate with Academic critics who pointed out a problem. Stoic virtue is in danger either of becoming an empty term if it disregards indifferents as things that do not contribute to the acquisition of the highest good or of ending up becoming a position similar to that of the Peripatetics, according to whom there is a hierarchy of goods, with virtue standing at the top, but *all* the goods contributing to happiness.⁵³

Seneca is aware of these theoretical problems. With Aristo's criticism of practical advice he also rejects Aristo's unorthodox claims that happiness can be achieved through indifference toward indifferents alone, i.e., by

⁵⁰ For example, *epist.* 51.8f.

⁵¹ There is some overlap between the terms; see Wyszomirski 1993: 48, Wildberger 2006: 873 n. 1326.

⁵² Ar. Did. in Stob. 2, p. 76, lines 9–15 Wachsmuth, trans. (partly) Long and Sedley 1987 (58K).

⁵³ See, in particular, Striker 1991, Barney 2003, Bénatouïl 2006, and the sources collected in Long and Sedley 1987, section 64.

simply understanding what is good, what is bad, and what is indifferent and consistently choosing the good things (*epist.* 94). As Seneca expresses it in a recurring phrase, indifferents are *materia virtutis*, both the stuff from which virtue is developed and thus made (see below) and the matter on which virtue expresses itself and performs its art of living.⁵⁴

All the same, attributing relative value to indifferents and finding a content for virtue is not one of Seneca's central philosophical concerns. Texts in which Seneca demonstrates that the Stoic sage can or should lead a normal material life are rare in his œuvre (*epist.* 5, *De vita beata*). More frequently, he advocates a moderately ascetic lifestyle and encourages his addressees and readers to disregard what is not a good. The Stoics quoted in the definitions above use the technical terms "selection" and "dissection" for the proper evaluation and choice of indifferents. The terms contain a reference to a selection process because, when dealing with indifferents, we usually have different options to choose from. In order to effect the selection, it is therefore necessary to assess the relative value of each available indifferent under the given circumstances. It is symptomatic, then, of Seneca's assessment of the real problems his philosophical writings should deal with that the verb "to despise" (*contemnere*) acquires the almost technical meaning of "evaluating indifferents correctly as something with relative and thus irrelevant value (in comparison to a really good or bad thing)."⁵⁵ The crucial point for Seneca is that one must stop attributing too much importance, i.e., too much positive or negative value, to indifferents because *that* is what most people get wrong.

7. VIRTUE AND ROMAN MANLINESS

It has, of course, been noticed that this ascetic focus brings Seneca close to contemporary Cynicism, whose proponents, on their part, often seem to have shown considerable sympathy for Stoic ideas.⁵⁶ All the same, Seneca's ascetism has also a distinctively Roman quality. In a striking passage (*epist.* 66.49–53), Seneca first acknowledges that, with regard to what is really good,

⁵⁴ *Epist.* 66.15, 71.21, 85.39, *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).21.4, 7.22.1, 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).6.2, *benef.* 4.19.4 (a different sense in 90.46). The expression goes back to Chrysippus in *Plut. mor. (On Common Notions against the Stoics)* 1069e = *SVF* 3.491: ὕλην τῆς ἀρετῆς. In *Epistle* 92.5, Seneca may be referring to Antipater's position in the debate about the value of indifferents; he says that Antipater accords too much importance to them.

⁵⁵ E.g., *epist.* 8.5, 23.7, 32.4, 39.4, 56.11, 58.28, 62.3, 65.22, 66.1, 71.19, 71.37, 73.14, 74.13, *dial.* 1 (*prov.*).6.1, *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).4.3, 7.20.3, 7.21.1 f.

⁵⁶ On the Cynic Demetrius, in particular, see Billerbeck 1979.

it makes no difference whether virtue expresses itself in a pleasurable or a difficult matter, but then states that he personally would tend to prefer “those [goods] that seem harsher to those that are soft and effeminate.”⁵⁷ This is, first of all, an *argumentum a maiore ad minus*. If there were any difference at all, adverse goods would even be better. Therefore, they must at least be equal, as is required by the thesis that all goods are equal in whatever matter they are expressed. It is also an argument that makes hortatory use of values we particularly associate with such Roman conceptions of virtue as fortitude and military valor: Seneca quotes the most Roman forms of praise, the archaic formula “*macte virtute esto*” (*epist.* 66.40) and contrasts the heroism of a Mucius Scaevola (*epist.* 66.51–53) with the enjoyment of certainly delightful but not very manly physical pleasures.

Seneca’s praise of the Stoic *vir invictus*, the invincible man who stands upright amid ruins, who equally despises pain and gold, draws on the Roman discourse of manliness. Like Cicero, Seneca uses the Roman term *vir bonus* to refer to the sage. Like Cicero, he represents and discusses virtuous behavior through traditional Roman *exempla*. Seneca even goes beyond what we find in his predecessor when, in Epistle 120, he develops a theory of how humans formed a concept of good by observing such exemplary figures and paints the picture of a sage that shows the very Roman traits of civic responsibility, fortitude, readiness to suffer hardships, and discipline (120.10–13). This is particularly remarkable because the epistemological ideas developed in this letter are not attested in any other Stoic source and may very well have originated with Seneca himself.⁵⁸

Other passages, too, bear witness to the same phenomenon that, in Seneca, Stoicism and typically Roman manliness blend harmoniously: among philosophers, only the Stoics offer a philosophy for real men (*dial.* 2 [= *const.*] 1.1); the Roman philosopher Quintus Sextius, who did not want to adhere to any Greek school, is characterized as a Stoic in essence, if not by profession (*epist.* 64.3), and as someone who practices philosophy in Greek but with the character and mindset of a true Roman.⁵⁹ Roman color can easily be applied by replacing, e.g. athletic imagery with imagery drawn from

⁵⁷ *Epist.* 66.49, trans. Inwood 2007a.

⁵⁸ Seneca is drawing on the Stoic theory of concept formation (Inwood 2007a: 324, note on *epist.* 120.3, Inwood 2005b). But neither the application of that theory to the concept of good nor the concept formation by simultaneous use of combination and idealization are attested elsewhere. On the contrary, the parallel account we find in Cic. *fn.* 3.20–22 (see below) presupposes that the notion of “good” derives from observation and conceptualization of behavior as it actually occurs.

⁵⁹ *Epist.* 59.7: *virum acrem, Graecis verbis, Romanis moribus philosophantem.*

the military life or gladiatorial combat.⁶⁰ At other points, Seneca expresses his perception of a difference by contrasting ineffective quibbling with the stern language of command characteristic of a society where authority and example promote uncontested values, where speech does not argue a point but helps to muster the strength to actually do what the audience already knows to be right and necessary (*epist.* 82.20–24). Even here, however, Seneca indicates that there is no fundamental clash but that the Greek philosophers should learn from the Romans. One of the adduced examples is the Spartan Leonidas with his men (21), and the whole passage is introduced as a suggestion of how Seneca, as a Stoic, would prefer to present Zeno's syllogisms more effectively in order to create real, heartfelt belief in their truth (19 f.).

8. KALON VS. HONESTUM

One of the most fundamental changes Stoicism underwent when being translated into Latin was the Roman interpretation of the Greek Stoic term *καλόν*.⁶¹ As Seneca insists again and again, only what is *καλόν* is good: *unum bonum quod honestum*. In translating *καλόν* as *honestum*, Seneca follows the lead of Cicero and others, thus helping to cement a linguistic usage that is responsible for a frequent misunderstanding—a misunderstanding that surely was intended by some Roman interpreters of Stoicism who used it to support their own value systems.⁶² It arises from the fact that the Latin word “*honestum*” no longer retains any trace of the meaning “beautiful” that is central to the Greek word “*καλόν*,” in general, and to *καλόν* as a Stoic concept, in particular.

The relation between good and *καλόν* is outlined in Diog. Laert. 7.101, where *καλόν* is defined as “virtue and what partakes in virtue.”⁶³ From such definitions, together with the interpretation as *honestum*, i.e., honorable, the word is often understood to refer to morally praiseworthy, honorable acts, such as saving one's fatherland, protecting the innocent, or pronouncing a just judgment. Often, these honorable acts are conceived in antithesis to

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Lavery 1980, Sommer 2001, Kroppen 2007.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Fischer 1914: 11, Eisenhut 1973: 66, Powell 1995: 299.

⁶² For Cicero, see, e.g., Dyck 1996: 31, Atkins 2000: 513.

⁶³ Compare in Seneca, e.g., *epist.* 67.10, 71.5, 76.11. This completed reason is called “virtue” and is, at the same time, what is honorable (*honestum*); 76.19, 82.12: “[...] whatever of these things has been approached and handled by virtue, is turned into something honorable and glorious;” 82.14, 85.17.

self-interested behavior or behavior that is in some way ignoble, e.g., because it is regarded as unlawful or as a base expression of animal instincts.

Now, for a Stoic, all these acts by themselves are neither καλόν nor its opposite, αἰσχρόν, but only things whose selection or disselection may be realizing a proper function of a human being. Proper functions are a class of predicates, namely those which it is in accordance with human nature to effect. The sage will therefore perform such proper functions, but only under suitable circumstances. The objects of proper functions are only to be selected in preference to other indifferents. A real Stoic *honestum* or καλόν, however, is to be sought unconditionally, absolutely, under all circumstances. And the thing that is a real *honestum* or καλόν can only be something that involves real Stoic virtue: either a perfect mind itself or something that partakes in some way of such a perfect mind, e.g., by being one of its actions.

One might, of course, wonder why something that ordinary people would regard as an honorable act is not a good thing for a Stoic. What is it that virtue adds to the act itself to turn it into something so beautiful and honorable (καλόν) that it becomes a good? A single act, may it be ever so praiseworthy, cannot be καλόν in itself. It stands on its own and is only a fragment. To be meaningful and the kind of good a human being can achieve, it must be part of a good life. It must be set in a context of a consistent harmonious whole. For a Stoic, this whole can only be virtue. Whatever we do without virtue lacks agreement and consistency because virtue itself is consistency (Diog. Laert. 7.89, Sen. *epist.* 74.30). This is why Seneca so often criticizes inconsistency and discontinuity, the lack of a coherent context for one's actions, as the hallmark of the fool.⁶⁴

The Stoics themselves inherited the term καλόν from archaic and classical Greek ethical discourse and seem to have invested it with various meanings. A series of explanations are given for why virtue or the good are said to be καλόν: because virtue naturally calls (καλεῖν) those who seek her (Ar. *Did.* in Stob. 2, p. 100, lines 21 f. Wachsmuth), because it has all the numbers that nature is looking for, or because it is perfectly symmetrical (Diog. Laert. 7.100). All these explanations presuppose that, for the Stoics, the word still retains at least some components of the meaning "beautiful": the καλόν is attractive; it is in some way completely worked out; it is symmetrical. In a similar manner, one of the three definitions of the word refers to καλόν as something that functions as an ornament,⁶⁵ this last sense being the one that is applied to the sage.

⁶⁴ For example, *epist.* 20.1–6, 23.8, 45.6, 52.1 f.

⁶⁵ Diog. Laert. 7.100: τὸ ἐπικοσμοῦν.

All the same, these sources do not yet tell us all: we still do not know what it means to a Stoic that something is beautiful. Unfortunately, no extant doxographic source gives us the complete Stoic definition of beauty (*κάλλος*). All the same, it can be reconstructed from a passage in Plotinus's *On Beauty* that is directed against the Stoic concept as an influential position contrary to Plotinus's own. Whereas for Plotinus beauty derives from the One, for the Stoics beauty presupposes a plurality of things. It is "symmetry of the parts with each other and with the whole."⁶⁶ Plotinus attributes this definition to "almost everyone." All the same, it can be shown both that this was at least accepted by the Stoics and that they used it in ethical discussions. Chrysippus, for example, is reported to have defined the beauty of the soul as a symmetry of its parts, a definition that recurs in Arius Didymus's *Handbook of Stoic Ethics*.⁶⁷

Accordingly, we can reconstruct⁶⁸ that a life is beautiful for a Stoic when it is a coherent whole (*ὅλον*) with parts, e.g., its single acts, and when all these parts are symmetrical and in harmony both with the whole and with each other. Once this is the case, every proper function a person effects is turned into a "perfect achievement" (*κατόρθωμα*), while the mind of that agent is now a virtue.

From this, one can conclude that, for a Stoic, something is *καλόν* in the ethical sense if it is a constituent of the beauty of the agent who has it. As such it must necessarily be a part of a whole, which explains why there cannot be isolated occurrences of it and why a single occurrence of *καλόν* is always part of a coherent whole, a complete good life. This specific nature of the *καλόν* and thus of what is good is also taken account of in two descriptions of the process by which a human being grasps the concept of the good. The one is to be found in the Stoic section in Cicero's *De finibus* (3.20–22). It explains how a concept of what is good is developed from self-observation. The young man observes how he is consistently acting according to nature and thus begins to understand what is good for him.

For a human being's first affiliation (*conciliatio*)⁶⁹ is toward those things that are in accordance with nature. But as soon as he has acquired an understanding, or rather the conception, which the Stoics call *ennoia*, and has seen the order

⁶⁶ Plot. 1.6.1: συμμετρία τῶν μερῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλα καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὅλον.

⁶⁷ Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5.2.47; compare also 31–33, Ar. Did. in Stob. 2, p. 63, lines 1–5 Wachsmuth; Cic. *Tusc.* 4.31.

⁶⁸ It must be pointed out that what follows is my reconstruction, which I believe to be consistent with most current readings of Stoic ethics. There are, however, scholars who offer a different account, e.g., Brennan 2005.

⁶⁹ This is Cicero's term for *οἰκείωσις*.

and, so to speak, harmony of his actions, he comes to value this far higher than all those objects of his initial affection; and he draws the rational conclusion that this constitutes the highest human good, which is worthy of praise and desirable for its own sake. Since that good is situated in what the Stoics call *homologia* ("agreement" will be our term for this [...]) [...] that good [...] is the only thing desirable through its intrinsic nature and value, whereas none of the first objects of nature is desirable for its own sake. (Cic. *fin.* 3,21)

The other account is one we find in Seneca, in Epistle 120, which was already mentioned above. It complements the account we find in Cicero in that it explains how a concept of the good can be developed by observing not oneself but other human beings. Here, humans understand what the good is by contracting single observations to a vision of the exemplary sage. This vision comes into being precisely at that moment when single traits are combined in such a way that an image of coherent, invariable behavior is formed.

Moreover, he was always the same and consistent with himself in every act; no longer good just by design, but so thoroughly habituated that he not only could act rightly but could not act other than rightly. We understood that in him virtue was complete. [...] On the basis of what, then, did we come to understand virtue? It was shown to us by this man's orderliness, fitting beauty (*decor*) and consistency, the mutual agreement of all his actions [...].⁷⁰

It is a characteristic of Seneca's descriptions of what is good that he prefers wealth of detail to focus and clarity. It is also characteristic that the sage we envision at this moment is a Roman hero, someone who combines all the virtues represented by the great traditional exempla, who lives a Roman upper-class life and understands his role in the cosmos as a *militia* with God as his commander. The beauty and agreement of this Roman sage's soul blend indistinguishably with the good old virtue of stubborn *constantia*, the steadfastness a *vir Romanus* shows when intent on his purpose. All the same, we can see that the foremost and basic, or rather essential, feature of the good is precisely that Stoic agreement (ὁμολογία) which comes about when everything fits together, when the parts of a life, its single actions, form a coherent whole with which they harmonize as beautifully as they harmonize with each other. Although Seneca uses the traditional Roman term *honestum*, he makes sure that his reader does not forget how beautiful that *honestum* is—but also that he sees at the same time how manly Stoic beauty can be.

⁷⁰ Sen. *epist.* 120.10 f., trans. Inwood 2007a, with alterations.

Nothing is better than virtue, nothing more beautiful.

No, I cannot see anything more beautiful for Iuppiter to find on earth [...] than to watch Cato [...].⁷¹

In sum: Seneca's writings demonstrate familiarity with and adherence to essential Stoic tenets concerning virtue, wisdom, and the good life. They also show signs of independent innovation, such as assigning a much more important role to intellectual progress and the theoretical knowledge that comes with it; personalizing the idea of "following nature"; the incorporation of Epicurean ideas about limits, tranquility, and joy; the hortatory use of a Cynic term "contempt" instead of the Stoic terms "selection" and "dissection"; and applying the Roman method of ethical argument by examples to design a new explanation of how a concept of good is formed. Most importantly, however, Seneca integrates all these elements into a model that builds on and incorporates an already existing tradition of Roman philosophy and is suitable for the reality in which he and his peers were living, a model that merits being called both "Roman" and "Stoic."

⁷¹ Sen. *epist.* 67.16 and *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).2.9. Compare, e.g., also *dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).12.5, 7 (= *vit. beat.*).15.2, *epist.* 66.6, 66.21.

ETHICS V: DEATH AND TIME

Catharine Edwards

The fear of death, for Seneca, casts over human life a terrible shadow. To accept death is the hardest lesson but the most important one for those seeking the happiness of philosophical calm. This can only be done, however, if we learn to manage correctly our understanding and use of time. The relationship between attitudes to death and to time often comes to the fore in Seneca's writing and is the prime concern of his treatise on the shortness of life, *De brevitae vitae*, composed probably 49–50 AD.¹ People complain that life is too short, observes Seneca, but any life is long enough if used properly. Much of the treatise is concerned with the carelessness with which people give away their time; people live their lives, he claims, as if they were never going to die: *tamquam semper victuri vivitis* (3.4), a reproach cast vividly in the second person.

The treatise concludes with exhorting Seneca's addressee Paulinus to abandon his public career at once and devote himself to philosophical leisure. Those who fill their days to an advanced age even with the law courts, the Forum, and the responsibilities of public office (to say nothing of the pursuit of pleasure) do not really experience life (20.5):

No one keeps death in view, no one restrains his hopes. Some indeed make plans for those things that lie beyond life—great hulking tombs and dedications of public works and offerings for funeral pyres and ostentatious funerals. Yet, in truth, the funerals of such men should be carried out by the light of torches and candles, as though they had lived but the shortest time.²

The signs that mark the death of a publicly distinguished man at an advanced age are juxtaposed with those of the death of a little child; as Seneca has repeatedly asserted earlier in the treatise, even a very old man's death, when he has not spent his life wisely, feels premature (cf. 3.3, 7.10, *epist.* 77.20).

¹ On the background to this treatise, see most recently Williams 2003: 19f., as well as Traina 1984: xv.

² *Nemo in conspicuo mortem habet, nemo non procul spes intendit; quidam vero disponunt etiam illa, quae ultra vitam sunt, magnas moles sepulcrorum et operum publicorum dedicationes et ad rogam munera et ambitiosas exequias. at me hercules istorum funera, tamquam minimum vixerint, ad faces et cereos ducenda sunt.*

Only the wise man, one who is conscious that he has used his time well, can approach death with a steady step, *certo gradu* (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].11.2).

The preoccupations of *De brevitae vitae* surface repeatedly in the *Epistulae morales*, the collection of letters written in the early 60s AD, which turned out to be Seneca's final work, composed in the ominous shadow of Nero's displeasure—written, it might seem, in borrowed time.³ Time, death, and the relationship between them are concerns with which Seneca opens the first of his *Epistulae morales*. He exhorts his addressee Lucilius: *tempus [...] collige et serva*, “gather and save your time” (*epist.* 1.1).⁴ Epistle 12, which concludes the first book in the collection, considers at length how time should be conceptualized and presents the contemplation of death as playing a crucial role.⁵

Time, for Seneca, figures among the key concerns of philosophy (*epist.* 88.33). But it is a relatively abstract concept, which can only be fully grasped by those whose philosophical progress is quite advanced (*epist.* 90.29). Earlier Stoics seem to have been notably preoccupied with time in the context of physics.⁶ Chrysippus is said to have argued that no time is present as a whole or exactly.⁷ When he chooses, Seneca is quite capable of engaging with the philosophical technicalities of time. Epistle 49 opens with a poignant account of how a visit to familiar places in Campania has made Seneca feel much more acutely the absence of his friend Lucilius. This emotive opening is a prelude to a discussion of time that touches suggestively on the more technical aspects. *Punctum est quod vivimus et adhuc puncto minus. sed et hoc minimum specie quadam longioris spatii natura derisit [...]*, “The time we spend living is a moment, even less than a moment. But this briefest time nature has mocked by making it appear of greater duration” (49.3). Seneca goes on to argue, however, that it is precisely the brevity of life that makes it foolish to waste time on technicalities of dialectic. *Mors me sequitur, fugit vita; adversus haec me doce aliquid*, “Death is at my heels, life runs away; teach me something that will help me confront this” (49.9). The technical conceptualization of time is useful insofar as it underpins Seneca's insistence on the urgency of his philosophical project.

³ On the chronology of Seneca's works and the circumstances under which they were written, see Griffin 1992. On Seneca's treatment of time in his works generally, see Grimal 1968, Armisen-Marchetti 1986, Gagliardi 1998.

⁴ On this letter see Gagliardi 1998: ch. 3, Richardson-Hay 2006 *ad loc.*

⁵ These concerns underlie all the letters but manifest themselves notably in Letters 4, 12, 23, 24, 26, 49, 61, 69, 70, 71, 77. Death has been seen as a particular theme of the third book of letters (22–29).

⁶ On the complexities of this see Goldschmidt 1979, Brunschwig 2003.

⁷ *SVF* II 509. Helpfully discussed by Schofield 1988.

According to the traditional Stoic scheme, time is one of four incorporeal things (along with the sayable, void, and place).⁸ Seneca acknowledges time's incorporeality (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].8.1; *epist.* 58.22) but does not insist on it. Armisen-Marchetti (1995b: 548) argues, in her perceptive discussion, that Seneca's prime concern is with human time, lived time, rather than cosmic time.⁹ Spatial imagery has an important role to play in Seneca's conceptualization of time. Linear images tend to feature in his discussions of the individual human life, often conceived as a *cursus* with a fixed end-point, while cosmic time is usually conceived of in terms of cycles, on the model of the cyclical motion of the planets (e.g., *dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].8.5; *epist.* 107.8f.).¹⁰ Lived time is sometimes measured in terms of change and decay. Epistle 12, for instance, dwells vividly on a house falling into disrepair, some overgrown trees and finally the human body, whose perceptible signs of aging constitute insistent reminders of time's irrevocable passage.¹¹

But an important part of Seneca's approach to the correct conceptualization of time is to encourage a shift in how human time is to be understood from the linear to the circular, from the existential to something approaching the cosmic. A cosmic model of time is brought into play in *De brevitae vitae*, where Seneca declares that the passage of present time can no more suffer delay "than the universe or the stars, whose perpetual unceasing motion never lets them rest in the same position" (10.6).¹² The relationship between human and cosmic time lies at the heart of Epistle 12, where Seneca observes: *Tota aetas partibus constat et orbis habet circumductos maiores minoribus*, "Our space of life is divided into parts; it consists of large circles enclosing smaller" (*epist.* 12.6). He repeats Heraclitus's opaque observation: *parem esse unum diem omnibus similitudine; nihil enim habet longissime temporis spatium, quod non et in uno die invenias*, "One day is equal to all days through resemblance, because the very longest space of time possesses no element that cannot be found in a single day" (12.7).¹³ Two possible interpretations of this are offered. First, each day is the same length, and made up of the same

⁸ Cf. SVF II 331, 521, 1142.

⁹ Cf. Traina 1984: x–xi. Seneca like Marcus Aurelius later is, in Rist's (1972: 287) terms, less interested in time "viewed primarily as a problem in physics" but rather concerned with time as "a moral problem".

¹⁰ Armisen-Marchetti 1995b: 550–552. Unusually in *epist.* 36.10 life itself is seen as cyclical—the time will return when we shall be restored to the light of day.

¹¹ Edwards 2005a. On Letter 12 see also Henderson 2004: 19–27.

¹² *Nec magis moram patitur quam mundus aut sidera, quorum inrequieta semper agitatio numquam in eodem vestigio manet.*

¹³ On the circles, see Habinek 1982. This issue is also explored in Ker 2009a.

divisions of time as any other. Second, each day has the same shape as any other, as light succeeds darkness, to be succeeded again by darkness. It is on the latter basis that one might understand a kind of equivalence between a day and a lifetime, as Habinek suggests. *Angustissimum habet dies gyrum, sed et hic ab initio ad exitum venit, ab ortu ad occasum*, "The day is the smallest circle, but this too has its beginning and its end, its sunrise and sunset" (12.6). Another implication of this resemblance seems to be that because each day of one's life is *like* the last day, it should not be too onerous to treat it as if it *were* the last day: *sic ordinandus est dies omnis, tamquam cogat agmen et consummet atque expleat vitam*, "every day should be regulated as if it concluded the series, as if it consummated and filled out our life" (12.8). An individual life seen as a circle may be experienced as complete, perfect, whenever it comes to an end.

Earlier Stoics, as we have seen, had debated at length how to define the present. Seneca seems inclined to treat the individual day as the most productive way of conceptualizing present time: *singuli tantum dies [...] praesentes sunt*, "Only one day at a time can be experienced in the present" (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].10.4). We might see this, he asserts, as a philosophical variant on the poet's motif of *carpe diem*; we should not focus on preparing for the future but live today rightly (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].9.3).¹⁴ The individual day is the focus of scrutiny according to the technique of self-examination Seneca repeatedly advocates, attributing it in *De ira* to the philosopher Sextius (*dial.* 5.36.1–3):

Sextius used to do this, and when the day was over and he had retired to bed he would put these questions to his soul: "What faults of yours have you cured today? What vice have you resisted? In what way are you improved?" [...] I have adopted this strategy and every day I plead my cause before myself as judge.¹⁵

For Seneca, the single day is the unit of time best adapted to a philosophical approach to life.¹⁶ While this emphasis is also to be found in other Stoic writers, for instance, Epictetus (*diatr.* 3.10.2),¹⁷ it is developed furthest in

¹⁴ On the contrast between Seneca and Horace's treatments of *carpe diem*, see Williams 2003: 22.

¹⁵ *Faciebat hoc Sextius, ut consummato die, cum se ad nocturnam quietem recepisset, interrogaret animum suum: "quod hodie malum tuum sanasti? Cui vitio obstitisti? Qua parte melior est?" [...] utor hac potestate et cotidie apud me causam dico.*

¹⁶ Cf. *epist.* 4.5, 16.1. This passage plays a key role in Foucault's *The care of the self* (1986: 46, 61 f.). On the practice of daily self-scrutiny, see Hadot 1995, Edwards 1997 and (offering an illuminating account of the *De ira* passage) Ker 2009b. For Ker, the strategies of time-control advocated by Seneca are deeply implicated in the set of techniques by which the Roman aristocracy maintained its social power.

¹⁷ Epictetus refers to Pythagorean practice in this context and Pythagorean writings may also have influenced Seneca. Cf. Ker 2009b.

Seneca. Indeed, as Foucault and others have observed, the practice might seem to underlie Seneca's treatment of his daily experiences in the *Epistulae morales* (perhaps most explicitly in *epist.* 83). Ker (2009b: 185) suggests that one might detect in the *De ira* passage "a fusion of day and self as the object of scrutiny." There is a kind of equivalence between control of time and control of the self set out even in the opening passage of the first letter in the collection, where Seneca urges Lucilius: *vindica te tibi, et tempus [...] collige et serva*, "Lay claim to yourself and gather and save your time."¹⁸

Seneca returns again and again to the excoriation of those who fail to value time correctly, who waste their own time. The denunciation of their failings is one of the principal themes of *De brevitae vitae*. They spend little of their lives in actually living (2.2). The letters, too, return repeatedly to the concern with time wasted. In Epistle 122, Seneca compares to the dead those who fritter away their time in the self-indulgent pursuit of pleasure (2 f.):

Though they pass the night-time hours with wine and perfume, though they spend every minute of their unnatural waking hours in eating dinners—and those, too, cooked separately to make up many courses—they are not really banqueting, they are conducting their own funerals.¹⁹

The luxurious anticipate their own deaths, not only in the sense that they may be shortening their lives but also in their preoccupation with the meaningless experiences of the body rather than with what is truly good.²⁰ The repetitive and unsatisfactory pleasures of the mortal flesh should be a matter of indifference to one who is properly focused on life's only true goal, the pursuit of virtue. As Seneca asserts in Epistle 12, one who wastes his time is not truly alive; *immo mortuus est*, "indeed he is dead" (12.9).

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

For Seneca, time is a supremely valuable possession, *re omnium pretiosissima* (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].8.1). Indeed, he sometimes characterizes it as the only thing that belongs to us: *omnia, Lucili, aliena sunt, tempus tantum nostrum est*, "No other things, Lucilius, belong to us; time alone is ours" (*epist.* 1.3). One must properly take account of one's time: *rationem facere* (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].17.5; cf.

¹⁸ Cf. Grimal 1968.

¹⁹ *Licet in vino unguentoque tenebras suas exigent, licet epulis et quidem in multa fericula discocitis totum perversae vigiliae tempus educant, non convivantur, sed iusta sibi faciunt.*

²⁰ Cf. *epist.* 60.3 f., 65.16. One might trace here the influence of Plato's *Phaedo* (esp. 65 f.), where Socrates is made to argue that the body is a tomb and the philosopher only truly lives insofar as he frees himself from the body's needs. See further Edwards 2007: 172–176.

dial. 9 [= *tranq.*] 3.8, *epist.* 1.4). A multitude of images drawn from commerce are used to emphasize time's value. As Armisen-Marchetti stresses, these also serve to undermine the traditional Stoic characterization of time as incorporeal. The idea of time as a commodity makes it seem fixed and static—and is in considerable tension with Seneca's stress on the fleeting nature of time (1995: 552 f.).

Seneca offers a variety of techniques to enable the would-be philosopher to take possession of time (1.2, 101.8). The very process of writing letters, in itself (at least as practiced by Seneca) a form of self-scrutiny, could be seen as a means to this end.²¹ The focus here is primarily on present time. *De brevitate vitae*, in particular, develops at length important distinctions between past, present, and future time: *in tria tempora vita dividitur: quod fuit, quod est, quod futurum est*. It is present time, often, as we have seen, conceptualized in terms of the individual day, which we must value and exploit to the full.²²

In contrast to the fleeting nature of the present, past time is *certum*, sure (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*] 10.2). It is an everlasting and untroubled possession (10.4). Fortune, which forever threatens the present and the future, has no dominion over the past. The past, therefore, has the capacity to be a source of certain happiness—at least for the would-be philosopher. Again, we must take possession of it. But the manner in which we effect this in relation to the past is different. We must allow ourselves (as those who are too busy, whether with work or pleasure, fail to do) the leisure to enjoy its recollection (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*] 10.4 f., cf. *epist.* 83.2). Memory plays a key role here.²³ But only those who have lived all their lives well are in a position to take pleasure from looking back (10.3 f.). And as he comments in the Epistles, it is only contemplation of the past that enables us to formulate a productive plan for the future (*epist.* 83.2).

Elsewhere, however, Seneca sometimes chooses rather to stress that time that is past no longer exists: *usque ad hesternum, quicquid transit tempus, perit*, "Even including yesterday, whatever time is passed is lost" (*epist.* 24.20). A later letter describes both past and future times as *aliena* (74.73).²⁴ In

²¹ Sangalli 1988: 55. On the broader implications of his use of epistolary form, see Wilson 2001.

²² Marcus Aurelius lays a similar emphasis on the need to focus on the present. Indeed his *To himself* offers a similarly episodic model of self-scrutiny. This is suggestively discussed by Hadot 1998: 131–137.

²³ The emphasis Seneca places on memory here is developed further in his discussions of the role of memory in overcoming the pain of bereavement in *cons. Helv.* and *cons. Marc.* (cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1995b: 554).

²⁴ Sangalli 1988: 59 sees Seneca as influenced by Epicureanism here. Cf. Grimal 1968.

reminding his reader how much time has already been wasted, Seneca seeks to underline the urgency of making good use of whatever time remains. It is the imminence of death that renders time so valuable, so precarious. It is by reminding ourselves of death's imminence that we may be galvanized to make the best use of our time.²⁵ The thought of death must be our constant companion.

Time must be valued, but we can never depend on it—future time cannot be counted on. Hope poses a significant threat to the mental tranquility that should be the philosopher's goal (*dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*].2.7–9). How long we live is not in our power, Seneca insistently reminds his reader.²⁶ “The man who is spurred ahead by hope of anything [...] is troubled and unsure of himself” (*epist.* 23.2). Hope is always accompanied by fear. Anxiety for the future creates intense wretchedness (*epist.* 98.6). And concern with the future serves as a dangerous distraction from the present, another cause of wasted time. One who thinks too much of the future spends his life getting ready to live rather than living (*epist.* 45.12 f.).

If we are to derive full value from the present, we must free ourselves from anxieties about the future. Above all, many people's lives are blighted by the fear of death.²⁷ This must be overcome if we are to enjoy life. A key strategy here is the *Praemeditatio futurorum malorum* (cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1986). Arguing that unexpected misfortunes are felt as more grievous blows than those for which one is prepared, Seneca advises his readers to make mental preparation for the possibility of poverty, of losing one's loved ones, one's home, but above all for death (*epist.* 30.18, 70.17 f.). One should make a habit of rehearsing these events in one's imagination, so that one is never taken by surprise. The imagination of one's own end, filled out in gruesome detail, is to be dwelt on and embraced.²⁸ The most appalling of future events transposed by imagination into the present can thus be robbed of their power.

Another way to conceptualize the experience of death is to think of it as a very gradual process, a process in which we are already far advanced. We die a little every day, Seneca advises his correspondent, in the first of the *Epistulae morales*: “What man can you show me who values his time, who takes account of the worth of each day, who understands that every day he is dying?” (1.2).²⁹ Seneca at once reminds his readers that past time is lost time.

²⁵ Marcus Aurelius offers similar comments, if not so insistently as Seneca (cf. *M. Aur.* 2.5.2).

²⁶ E.g., *epist.* 92.25, 93.4–7.

²⁷ Here too Seneca has much in common with Lucretius' version of Epicureanism, cf. Edwards 2007: ch. 3.

²⁸ See Edwards 2007: 107.

²⁹ Cf. *epist.* 24.20 f., 58.24.

It is already in the possession of death. Yet by this means he also presents a picture of death itself as an already familiar part of our lives rather than the great unknown. Here, too, Seneca focuses on rethinking our disposition toward death by transposing it from the future to the present.

Seneca insists repeatedly that the length of one's life is not significant (*epist.* 77.20). Death, he claims, should not be seen as an intrinsically bad thing. Is there no case to be made, we might wonder, for regret at, for example, good deeds unfinished? A crucial consideration here is that for Stoics virtue does not need the dimension of time to be complete (*epist.* 78.27, 93.4). Behavior is judged on the basis of intention rather than result: *consilium rerum omnium sapiens, non exitum spectat* (*epist.* 14.16). The wise man lives fully in the present moment (cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1995b: 565).

ACCEPTING DEATH

The wise man never does anything unwillingly; dying well is dying willingly, Seneca observes (*epist.* 61.2, 82.17 f.). The philosopher, then, accepts death. His disposition toward death colors the whole of his existence. But it is most evident at the moment when he meets his own end. The question of how one should die has a particular prominence in the Epistles. It is here that we find articulated most explicitly a view (which can also be found in the writings of other authors of the Principate) that the moment of death, above all, expresses an individual's true value. *Mors de te pronuntiatura est*, "death will pronounce judgment on you" (*epist.* 26.6).³⁰ It is because dying is such a significant experience that one must prepare oneself with particular care to face death: *egregia res est mortem condiscere* "It is a great thing to learn thoroughly how to die" (26.6).³¹ This is what philosophy primarily offers (cf. *dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].15.1, *epist.* 4.6). Seneca's use of this claim as a means of countering the fear of death might seem paradoxical. But his argument is that only one who has learned to overcome the fear of death can die well.

Examples of courageous ends have a key role to play here. Seneca explores in detail instances of individuals who encounter death from disease with great bravery. His friend Bassus, for example, overwhelmed by the infirmities of old age, is praised at length for seeing death coming and welcoming it (*epist.* 30.9). The death of Socrates, condemned to drink hemlock in

³⁰ On this as a general cultural preoccupation see Edwards 2007.

³¹ There is perhaps an echo of Plat. *Phaid.* 64a.

an Athenian prison recurs several times, as does that of Regulus.³² Most striking, perhaps, is Seneca's repeated celebration of the suicide of Cato the Younger, notably in Epistle 24.³³ By rehearsing in our minds the deeds of such individuals we can perhaps spur ourselves to equal their bravery when the time comes.

A TIME TO DIE

Accepting death may sometimes, as in Cato's case, entail choosing death. One might say that suicide can offer the most graphic evidence that one has overcome the fear of death.³⁴ Seneca's frequent references to and examples of suicide are an aspect of his writing that has disturbed (and fascinated) many readers. They need to be seen as a key part of his project to overcome the fear of death (Griffin 1992: 384). The implication of numerous passages in the Epistles is that to take one's own life at the moment one chooses may sometimes be a good death. Seneca concludes Epistle 69 with further observations on death: *hoc meditare et exerce, ut mortem et excipias et, si ita res suadebit, accersas*, "consider and practice this—how you may welcome death and, if circumstances recommend, invite it" (epist. 69.6). The following letter, Epistle 70, offers a lengthy and sustained exploration of the right time to die.

Seneca, in Epistle 69, invokes Epicurus's advice: *meditare mortem*, "think on death." Yet the Epicureans apparently condemned suicide under almost all circumstances—despite their doctrine that "death is nothing to us" (*Kyria doxa* 2, cf. Warren 2001: 92). When he killed himself the philosopher Diodorus was criticized, according to Seneca, for not following the teachings of Epicurus (*dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*].19.1).³⁵ By contrast, Stoicism in imperial Rome, at least in Seneca's rendering of it, seems to endorse, even encourage, suicide under certain circumstances. Arthur Darby Nock famously referred to "the Stoic cult of suicide" (1933: 197). Seneca's views on the appropriateness of suicide are to some extent shared by other Stoics (even if his concern

³² Socrates: *epist.* 13.14, 67.7; Regulus: *epist.* 67.7, 12.

³³ See too *epist.* 13.14, 98.12, *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).2.12, *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).16. Edwards 2007: 87–90.

³⁴ For some—in other cases, paradoxically, suicide can actually be motivated by the fear of death, *epist.* 4.4, 24.23.

³⁵ Though *nota bene epist.* 12.10 f. On Epicurean attitudes to suicide, see also Hill 2004: ch. 3 who stresses that some texts offer a rather different picture, most notably Cic. *fin.* 1.49 where the Epicurean Torquatus asserts that the individual may leave life whenever he or she chooses, as though leaving the theatre.

with suicide is particularly intense).³⁶ Epictetus acknowledges Stoic teaching that suicide could be justified under intolerable circumstances, although he seems to insist on a theological endorsement.³⁷ Closer still to Seneca is the view Cicero puts in Cato's mouth in *De finibus* (3.60–62) and that outlined by Diogenes Laertius.³⁸ According to Diogenes in his account of Zeno and later Stoics (7.130), they considered self-killing to be an appropriate action, if it would save a friend's life, if it would benefit one's country, or if it would allow one to escape from painful or incurable disease. Seneca invokes this as Stoic tradition. In Epistle 104 he comments that Socrates can teach us how to die when it is necessary, Zeno before it is necessary (104.21).³⁹

According to Stoic theory, as set out by Diogenes Laertius (7.130), one might simply calculate whether the natural advantages of living are outweighed by the corresponding disadvantages.⁴⁰ Seneca presents himself as readily resorting to such a process of calculation, in considering whether life continues to be worth living in the face of the physical and mental afflictions of old age (*epist.* 58.34f.). The term *ratio*, in the sense of calculation, recurs frequently in Seneca's discussions of when is the right time to die (accounting imagery that also figures significantly in Seneca's thinking about time, as we have seen).⁴¹ Should one anticipate the executioner or not? Sometimes this may be the appropriate course. But on other occasions to wait is better. An important example here is that of Socrates (70.9):

³⁶ According to Griffin 1992: ch. 11. However for Rist, Seneca's interest in suicide far exceeds that of other stoics. "Seneca's wise man is in love with death", comments Rist 1969: 249. For a comprehensive account of Seneca's comments on suicide see Tadic-Gilloteaux 1963. Hill also discusses these texts in detail, arguing that Seneca "produces very little that is philosophically innovative" with regard to suicide (2004: 147).

³⁷ Cf. 3.24.101f. Long 2002: 203f. comments: "Epictetus shows none of Seneca's fascination with suicide, nor does he treat it, like Seneca, as the supreme test of Stoic freedom." Cf. Droge and Tabor 1992: 34–37.

³⁸ Though Rist 1969: 239–241 argues that according to the position set out by Cicero's Cato, only the *sapiens* is ever in a position to know when it is right to kill himself. On the vagueness of this Ciceronian account, see Hill 2004: 36–41.

³⁹ As Griffin 1992: 373 suggests, it makes most sense to interpret Seneca's Zeno not as making an arbitrary decision but as perceiving the increasing weakness of his body (cf. *epist.* 58.34).

⁴⁰ Cf. *Cic. fin.* 3.60f. On the notion of the balance sheet, see van Hooff 1990: 122, Griffin 1986: 200.

⁴¹ E.g. *epist.* 14.2, 24.24, 98.16. Griffin 1992: 376–380 discusses some specific examples of such calculations in the letters. On the discourse of *rationes* in relation to planning one's death see also Plin. *epist.* 1.12.3–5 on the death of Corellius Rufus.

Socrates could have brought his life to an end by abstaining from food rather than dying of the poison. Yet he passed thirty days in prison with death in prospect and not with the thought that anything could happen, that such an extended period brought many hopes but in order that he might show himself obedient to the laws and let his friends benefit from the last days of Socrates.⁴²

Interestingly, Seneca chooses not to engage with the argument Socrates is made to advance in the *Phaedo* against suicide, that it is only permissible when one has received a divine sign.⁴³ Rather he stresses Socrates's wish to demonstrate his own respect for the laws of Athens. At the same time, the desire to benefit others, even though one might experience greater pain oneself, is also shown as a laudable motive for letting the law take its course rather than rushing to embrace death.⁴⁴

The example of Drusus Libo that follows is altogether more ambiguous. Seneca seems at first to be reproaching him for not following his aunt's advice and awaiting execution rather than taking his own life, after his conspiracy against the emperor was discovered. But Seneca then shifts tack: *manus sibi attulit, non sine causa*, "He laid violent hands on himself—and not without reason" (70.10). What point is there in living for another few days at one's enemy's pleasure? Significantly, this line of debate leads Seneca to the claim (*epist.* 70.11):

And so you cannot make a general pronouncement on the matter of whether, when an external force decrees death, you should anticipate it or wait for it. For there are many considerations which may incline a person in one direction or the other.⁴⁵

There is no general answer.⁴⁶ Thus, careful consideration is always needed. Moreover, the process of reasoning is itself particularly valuable. This is a key aspect of the contemplation of suicide, which could be seen as, for Seneca, the most important philosophical exercise the would-be philosopher undertakes.⁴⁷

⁴² *Socrates potuit abstinentia finire vitam et inedia potius quam veneno mori. Triginta tamen dies in carcere et in expectatione mortis exegit, non hoc animo tamquam omnia fieri possent, tamquam multas spes tam longum tempus reciperet, sed ut praeberet se legibus, ut fruendum amicis extremum Socraten daret.*

⁴³ On the *Phaedo*'s discussion of suicide, see Warren 2001. On Seneca's engagement with this see further Edwards 2007: 105.

⁴⁴ Compare the example Seneca offers in Letter 98 of an elderly friend who, despite suffering pain, continues to live while he may be of service to his companions (98.15–18).

⁴⁵ *Non possis itaque de re in universum pronuntiare, cum mortem vis externa denuntiat, occupanda sit an expectanda. Multa enim sunt quae in utramque partem trahere possunt.*

⁴⁶ See Inwood 2005a: 106, 113 on the discussion of situational factors in *epist.* 71.

⁴⁷ See Hill 2004: 151–157.

DEATH AND FREEDOM

Death is to be accepted. Sometimes it is to be chosen. For Seneca death has a positive value for the opportunity it can offer to exercise virtue. The thought of death can also, under some circumstances, serve as an important source of hope—perhaps the only hope the philosopher may legitimately entertain. For death can offer a very particular kind of freedom, *libertas*. In Epistle 24, Seneca makes Cato, on the point of taking his own life, exclaim (*epist.* 24.7):

“O fortune,” he said, “you have achieved nothing by impeding all my enterprises. Until this time, I fought not for my own liberty but for that of my fatherland, nor did I act with such persistence so that I might be free but so that I might live among the free. Now that our state has no future, let Cato be led to safety!”⁴⁸

Similarly, Seneca has Jupiter in *De providentia* declare that Cato’s sword can give him *libertatem, quam patriae non potuit*, “the freedom it could not give his fatherland” (2.10).⁴⁹ Seneca’s marked emphasis on the freedom suicide can offer could be read as a counter to the concerns of some Stoics who concluded that “if we are supposed to live according to nature, we should wait for nature to release us from life.”⁵⁰ Cato’s death seems to have prompted an intense debate about the acceptability of suicide (cf. Plut. *Brut.* 40.4).

The freedom death can offer is repeatedly stressed in the letters more generally. Death offers *libertas recedendi*, “the freedom to withdraw” (22.5 f.). Thus death is something to be valued rather than feared: *Mihi crede, Lucili, adeo mors timenda non est, ut beneficio eius nihil timendum sit*, “Believe me, Lucilius, so little is death to be feared that, thanks to death, nothing is to be feared” (24.11). Epistle 26 develops this idea at some length: “*meditare mortem*”; *qui hoc dicit, meditari libertatem iubet*, “Think on death: one who says this instructs us to think on freedom” (26.10).⁵¹ And Seneca criticizes those philosophers who exclude the possibility of committing suicide: *hoc qui dicit, non videt se libertatis viam cludere*, “One who says this does not see

⁴⁸ “Nihil,” inquit, “egisti, fortuna, omnibus conatibus meis obstando. Non pro mea adhuc sed pro patriae libertate pugnavi, nec agebam tanta pertinacia, ut liber, sed ut inter liberos viverem. Nunc quoniam deploratae sunt res generis humani, Cato deducatur in tutum.”

⁴⁹ Cf. too *epist.* 95.72. In *epist.* 14.12 f., however, Seneca sets out the view that *libertas* was already lost when Caesar and Pompey were in conflict and that it was not appropriate for the philosopher to take part in the struggle for power between them.

⁵⁰ As Griffin 1992: 375 suggests.

⁵¹ Seneca here claims to be quoting Epicurus. Further examples in the Letters include: 66.13, 16; 70.14, 24 f. *De providentia* also returns to this theme (*dial.* 1.6.7): *adtendite modo et videbitis quam brevis ad libertatem et quam expedita ducat via*, “only observe and you will see what a short and easy path leads to liberty”. See too *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*) 20.2 f.

that he is shutting the gate to freedom" (70.14). The slightest of weapons will achieve this end: *scalpello aperitur ad illam magnam libertatem via et puncto securitas constat*, "A small blade opens the way to great liberty and peace of mind can come through a pin prick" (70.16).

In Stoic philosophy, freedom (*eleutheria* in Greek, *libertas* in Latin) had come to have the sense of "total independence of the person from all passions and from all wrong desires."⁵² Such an understanding of freedom could reinforce the appeal of death as a means of escape from any situation, no matter how oppressive. A key issue here must be agency.⁵³ The option of death guarantees that action is always possible, however constrained one's circumstances may be. As Seneca comments (*epist.* 26.10):

One who has learned to die has unlearned slavery. He is superior to all powers, and certainly beyond their reach. What to him are prison, guards and fetters? He has an open door.⁵⁴

Here, then, is at least part of the value in thinking on death, in calculating and recalculating whether and for how long one's life may be worth living. Such exercises serve to keep the possibility of freedom forever before one's eyes.

At the same time there seems to be an ambivalence here, highlighted by Seneca's pervasive use of military imagery. At one point, Seneca comments with regard to the freedom offered by the possibility of suicide: *si pugnare non vis, licet fugere*, "if you do not want to fight, you can run away" (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*] 6.7). This surely reveals a tension in Seneca's thinking on suicide.⁵⁵ For the Socrates of Plato's *Phaedo*, suicide was no more to be contemplated than deserting one's guard post (62b).⁵⁶ Yet that seems to be just what Seneca is advocating in this passage from *De providentia*.

⁵² Bobzien 1998a: 339. As Inwood comments, this constitutes an "internalisation of social and political reality". On this issue, see particularly Inwood 2005a: ch. 11, 'Seneca on freedom and autonomy'.

⁵³ Inwood 2005a: 306. Contrast the view of Hill 2004: 11, who argues that in Roman discussions of suicide the central issue is not agency but rather honour. His approach rightly emphasises the Roman tendency to categorise together voluntary and enforced suicides. Yet even in the case of the latter there might be considered some scope for agency which though limited is nevertheless highly valued. See further Edwards 2007: ch. 4.

⁵⁴ *Qui mori didicit, servire dedidicit; supra omnem potentiam est, certe extra omnem. Quid ad illum carcer, et custodia, et claustra? Liberum ostium habet.*

⁵⁵ Lavery 1980: 150 comments: "the suicide would appear to be a deserter in battle and a soldier who surrenders to fortune". Another aspect of this problem is discussed by Griffin 1992: 380 f.: "If the virtue of the wise man's actions lies in its intentions, not its result, what danger of disgraceful action can he be said to avoid through suicide?"

⁵⁶ The term *phrouria* can also have the sense of "prison" as well as "guard-post".

The most extreme—and notorious—formulation of Seneca's celebration of suicide comes in his treatise on anger, *De ira*. Seneca has been describing situations in which anger will inevitably arise and what the consequences might be of concealing or revealing it. Praexaspes has been punished for advising king Cambyses that he should moderate his drinking; the king demonstrates his steadiness of hand by shooting an arrow—through the heart of Praexaspes's son. Praexaspes praises the king's aim—he thus demonstrates that anger can be restrained under the most extreme provocation. Harpagus, the object of another king's cruelty, finds at the king's banquet that he has been served and has eaten the bodies of his own children. He, too, moderates his anger, flattering the monarch (*dial.* 5 [= *de ira* 3].14 f.). While these stories purport to show that anger can always be concealed—ostensibly a good thing—they also reveal some profound difficulties for Seneca's position.⁵⁷ Ultimately, he cannot bring himself to endorse the restraint of either Praexaspes or Harpagus. Praexaspes is a slave in mind *animo* [...] *mancipium* (*de ira* 3.14.3). The gods should curse him. In relation to Harpagus, Seneca comments that he should try *quaerere dignam tam truci portento poenam*, “to find a punishment worthy of such monstrous ferocity” (3.15.2).⁵⁸ For these men, urges Seneca, suicide by any means would surely be the best option. It is to them he offers this chilling advice (3.15.4):

Wherever you turn your gaze, there is an end to your troubles. Do you see that cliff? From there you can drop to freedom. Do you see that sea, that river, that well? Freedom lies in its depths. Do you see that stunted, twisted, barren tree? Freedom hangs from it. Do you see your throat, your gullet, your heart? They are the means to escape slavery. Are the ways out I'm showing you too troublesome? Do they require too much bravery, too much strength? Do you ask what may be the way to freedom? Any vein in your body!⁵⁹

Detachment, Seneca understands, is and should be impossible. He cannot quite bring himself to advocate any act of resistance to tyranny other than suicide; the individual cheats the tyrant of the pleasure of his murder—the most

⁵⁷ As Nussbaum 1994: 437 (cf. 435) emphasises: “The twistings and turnings of the text contain a far more complex message.”

⁵⁸ Nussbaum 1994: 434 stresses the vehemence of Seneca's language here and comments: “Seneca never seriously doubts that a parent will *feel* anger inside himself at these incidents, nor does he even try to suggest that it would be a good thing if he didn't.”

⁵⁹ *Quocumque respexeris, ibi malorum finis est. vides illum praecipitem locum? illac ad libertatem descenditur. vides illud mare, illud flumen, illum puteum? libertas illic in imo sedet. vides illam arborem brevem, retorridam, infelicem? pendet inde libertas. vides iugulum tuum, guttur tuum, cor tuum? effugia servitutis sunt. nimis tibi operosos exitus monstro et multum animi ac roboris exigentes? quaeris quod sit ad libertatem iter? quaelibet in corpore tuo vena!*

effective punishment he can devise.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the decision to withdraw from the world by deciding on suicide, motivated as it is by anger, constitutes the Stoic as one deeply implicated in the world and what happens in it.

The act of choosing death could convey a specifically political message.⁶¹ To celebrate death as a means of escape is to undermine the power of a regime that seeks to control its subjects through the threat of lethal punishment. This political dimension is explicit in the Stoic Epictetus's discussion of suicide, where keen students want to demonstrate by their own deaths that tyrants have power over no one (1.9.15). Seneca alludes to the general moral weakness that afflicts his contemporaries. Yet even now some show enough spirit to seek security in death (*epist.* 24.11):

Think about our own times, whose inertia and fastidiousness we complain about. They will include persons of every rank, of every degree of fortune, of every age who have cut short their own trouble with death.⁶²

It is interesting that Seneca does not, in the *Epistles*, refer explicitly to specific *exempla* of self-killings from times closer to his own.⁶³ But this more general claim certainly adduces self-inflicted death as a means of displaying qualities opposed to the moral weakness exemplified by *languor* and *delicia*. The political overtones of *libertas* (with which Seneca so closely associates death) are never wholly absent.

In political terms, this is a kind of resistance but one that in some respects carries a heavy price.⁶⁴ In Seneca's writing we see what appears to be an increasingly extreme form of the Stoic depreciation of life. At 71.12, for instance, political change is, on one level, to be equated with the change of the seasons, something over which one has no control whatever, something that must simply be accepted. We may well feel uneasy at the implications of a philosophy that effectively discourages its adherents from taking any initiative to change a social order they find repugnant. And yet, once no choice was left, Stoicism, especially as developed in Seneca's writing, could offer a means to make sense of a horrible death, to appropriate it as part of a virtuous life. And even before death was imminent, to think over in advance

⁶⁰ See Nussbaum 1994: 436 f.

⁶¹ The limitation of suicide, however, is that it can never make the same kind of statement on behalf of social justice that could be conveyed by a more active kind of resistance, such as an attack on the king. See Nussbaum 1994: 436 and Barton 1994: 59.

⁶² *Respice ad haec nostra tempora, de quorum languore ac deliciis querimur; omnis ordinis homines suggerent, omnis fortunae, omnis aetatis, qui mala sua morte praeciderint.*

⁶³ Though the death of Cremutius Cordus, Marcia's father, is discussed briefly in *cons. Marc.* 1.2, while that of Julius Canus receives extended treatment in *tranq.* 14.4–10.

⁶⁴ See Nussbaum 1994: 468.

how one might die was to prepare oneself against the worst, to assume an armor that might prove invincible.

Seneca is by no means an enthusiastic advocate of suicide under all circumstances. In Epistle 24, having first referred to Epicurus's criticism of those *qui mortem concupiscent*, "who desire death," Seneca himself explicitly criticizes those who are obsessed with death. The brave and wise man should avoid that *libido moriendi*, "longing for death," which has afflicted so many (24.25).⁶⁵ "The idle and abject," *ignavos iacentesque*, finding life tedious, often fall victim to a desire to die. The diurnal pleasures of the flesh slip readily into torments (24.16).⁶⁶

At the same time, in Epistle 24, he also concedes that it is sometimes the noblest individuals, *generosos atque acerrimae indolis viros*, who are overtaken by the desire for death. While apparently condemning those who are simply tired of life, he expresses sympathy with those who despise it.⁶⁷ In Epistle 30, which, beginning with the particular case of Bassus, discusses death in old age, Seneca praises the inspiration offered both by those who call for death—*qui deposcunt mortem*—and those who meet it in a state of calm and good cheer—*qui hilares eam quietique opperiuntur* (30.12). He goes on to qualify his praise for the former: *illud ex rabie interdum ac repentina indignatione fit*, "this first attitude is sometimes derived from frenzy and sudden anger." Yet this is not invariably the case, as *interdum* makes clear. Such statements seem to betray a profound ambivalence on Seneca's part.

There is perhaps an acknowledgment that the wise man might legitimately want death. An endless life, after all, would be a life without meaning.⁶⁸ Certain people say to themselves, claims Seneca (*epist.* 24.26):

How long will these things go on? Shall I keep on waking up and going to sleep, being hungry and being full, getting cold, getting hot? There is no end to anything but all goes round in circles, one thing connected to another, each succeeding the one before? Night comes on the heels of day, day on the heels of night. Summer lapses into autumn, winter follows autumn, spring puts an end to winter. Everything passes away so that it returns again [...].⁶⁹

⁶⁵ For Stoic criticism of the desire for death, see also Epictetus 1.9.12 and 2.15.4–12.

⁶⁶ Hill 2004: 175–178 offers a suggestive discussion of Seneca's *fastidiosi*, stressing the influence of as well as the contrast with Lucretius.

⁶⁷ Disapproval of those who kill themselves for frivolous reasons, out of boredom or under the influence of extreme emotion: *cons. Helv.* 10.9 f., *tranq.* 2.14 f., *de ira* 2.36.5 f., *epist.* 4.4.

⁶⁸ Discussing Letter 12, Habinek 1982: 68 helpfully cites Bernard Williams' argument about the meaninglessness of endless life, set out in his 1973 essay 'The Makropoulos case: reflections on the tediousness of immortality'.

⁶⁹ "*Quousque eadem? Nemp̄e exp̄ergisc̄ar dormiam, esuriam fastidiam, algebo aestuabo. Nullius rei finis est, sed in orbem nexa sunt omnia, fugiunt ac secuntur. Diem nox premit, dies*

While earlier in the letter Seneca explicitly criticized those on whom excessive familiarity with the routines of life weighed heavily, this passage could be taken to express greater sympathy with this perspective.⁷⁰ It is tempting to see an echo here of Seneca's discussion of the structures of time in Epistle 12, where time is understood in terms of *orbes*, "circles" (12.6). The insistent, repetitive demands of the flesh intensify the philosopher's disdain for the body. As Plato's Socrates advised in the *Phaedo* (63a–64b), embodied life has little to offer the philosopher, who should always be preparing for death.

WRITING IN TIME

Seneca's mode of philosophy is largely paraenetic. His work offers an approach to wisdom, which is to be achieved by slow maturation, the outcome of lengthy spiritual exercises. This is a process that operates in and through time (Armisen-Marchetti 1995b: 545). As Grimal (1968: 109) suggests, it is in part Seneca's preoccupation with the experience of everyday life that informs his particular concern with temporality. The very concept of a series of Epistles itself implies composition over time. Seneca's letters describe incidents that appear to hook them into their author's quotidian experience. Epistle 64, for instance, begins "Yesterday you were with us," and describes a convivial evening of fireside talk with a group of friends. The letters of Cicero earlier and (later) Pliny the Younger, though quite possibly edited after their original time of composition, present themselves as compositions firmly situated in a particular time. Although Seneca's letters, by contrast, do not contain the kind of references to specific events that would allow their precise dating (much to the frustration of modern scholars), nevertheless they appear as a sequence composed in order over an extended period, most notably by evoking the gradual philosophical development of Lucilius.⁷¹

Waiting for Nero's centurion, Seneca will have been especially alert to the possibility that each letter he added might prove to be the last in the collection (as it is, it seems the final letters he wrote have not survived).⁷² At whatever point the series is interrupted it will be complete, he asserts—like

noctem, aestas in autumnum desinit, autumnus hiemps instat, quae vere conpescitur; omnia sic transeunt et revertantur. nihil novi facio, nihil novi video; fit aliquando et huius rei nausia."

⁷⁰ We might compare an observation offered as consolation for the inevitability of death in Letter 77.16: "Your pleasures have been exhausted; none of them is a novelty."

⁷¹ On this contrast see further Edwards 2005b.

⁷² Aulus Gellius (12.2.3) refers to a now lost twenty-second book of letters.

the life of the wise man. In Epistle 12, Seneca advised: *sic ordinandus est dies omnis, tamquam cogat agmen et consummat atque expleat vitam*, “every day should be regulated as if it concluded the series, as if it consummated and filled out our life” (12.8). It is death’s imminence that makes urgent the need to balance life’s account at the end of every day. Each day should be treated as if it were our last. This thought recurs later in the letters (*epist.* 61.1f.):

I am behaving as if each day were a complete life. Of course, I’m not seizing it as my last but I look upon it as if it could be my last. This is the frame of mind in which I am writing to you now, as if death might call me away, just as I am writing.⁷³

The claim is made still more insistently in Epistle 101: *qui cotidie vitae suae summam manum inposuit, non indiget tempore*, “One who puts the finishing touch to his life every day is never in need of time” (101.8). But can the life of the *proficiens*, one who is merely on the road to philosophical understanding, be understood as complete? Is there not a profound tension between the exhortation to see life as whole, whenever it terminates, and the sense of a philosophical journey toward *sapientia*, a journey that death might well interrupt before the goal is attained?

Yet there are perhaps other senses in which Seneca’s writings offer a more powerful challenge to the limitations of mortality. The opening of Epistle 64 moves from the recollection: *Fuisti here nobiscum*, “Yesterday you were with us,” to a different kind of engagement with temporality: *mecum [...] semper es*, “you are always with me.” There is an important sense in which letters have the power to transcend constraints of both space and time. The act of writing can serve as a strategy to fix time, and thus to transcend death. The writers, too, can hope to overcome mortality. In Epistle 21, Seneca evokes the analogy of Cicero’s Epistles to Atticus, promising Lucilius renown similar to that of Cicero’s friend among future generations: “Time’s deep flood will roll over us; a few great men will put their heads above it and, though bound in the end to depart into that silence, will resist oblivion and for a long while maintain possession of themselves”⁷⁴ (*epist.* 21.5). Achievement through writing will enable some talented individuals to maintain a presence far into the future. In his prediction *se vindicabunt*, “they will maintain possession of themselves,” Seneca uses a term that appeared in his exhortation to Lucilius

⁷³ *Id ago, ut mihi instar totius vitae dies sit. Nec mehercules tamquam ultimum rapio, sed sic illum aspicio, tamquam esse vel ultimus possit. Hoc animo tibi hanc epistulam scribo, tamquam me cum maxime scribentem mors evocatura sit.*

⁷⁴ *Profunda super nos altitudo temporis veniet, pauca ingenia caput exerent et in idem quandoque silentium abitura oblivioni resistent ac se diu vindicabunt.*

in the opening sentence of the first letter in the collection: *vindica te tibi* (*epist.* 1.1). The longevity of great writing offers another kind of mastery of time, allowing the philosophical self, the author (and perhaps his correspondent too) the means to continue his existence far beyond the limit of human mortality.

The relationship between time and philosophical writing is also a key concern in *De brevitae vitae*. Reading the philosophers, Seneca stresses here (echoing earlier poetic texts as well as Aristotle), can enable the reader to escape time: *hi tibi dabunt ad aeternitatem iter [...] haec una ratio est extendendae mortalitatis, immo in immortalitatem vertendae*, “They will offer you the road to immortality [...] This is the only means to prolong mortality, indeed to transform it into immortality” (15.4). The philosopher is freed from the limits that constrain others (the most significant of these being death) (15.4). The philosopher alone has the capacity to collapse distinctions between past, present, and future, to combine all times into one: *longam illi vitam facit omnium temporum in unum conlatio*, “Combining all times into one makes life long for him” (15.5). Philosophers teach us how to die (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].15.1) but at the same time communing with philosophers allows one to transcend time (15.4).⁷⁵

In his *Aporias: Dying—Awaiting (one another at) the “limits of truth”* (1993), Derrida draws on the *De brevitae vitae*. Seneca’s intense engagement with death, his sense of the imminence of death, Derrida finds particularly good to model, as one contemplates “the rear-view mirror of a waiting-for-death at every moment” (1993: 55). Death limits time, death gives time its value, makes us value time. The vividness with which Seneca conveys this has appealed to many readers. But more than this, it is precisely in accepting the time-bound nature of human life, the inevitability of death that, for Seneca, we can come closest to the transcendence of both death and time. In one of the last of his letters to have survived, Seneca comments paradoxically that the human heart *numquam magis divinum est, quam ubi mortalitatem suam cogitat*, “is never more divine than when it reflects on its mortality” (120.14).

⁷⁵ On this passage see Dionigi 1995a and Williams 2003 *ad loc.*

PHYSICS I: BODY AND SOUL

R. Scott Smith

As a point of departure for our discussion of body and soul in Seneca we would do well to recall Quintilian's assessment of Seneca's capacity as a philosopher (*inst.* 10.1.129): *in philosophia parum diligens, egregius tamen vitiorum insectator fuit*, "in philosophy he was not meticulous enough, yet he was outstanding in his persecution of vices." If Seneca was not concerned with providing a thorough account of the physical nature of the body and soul, we need not look far for a reason. His preoccupation with ethics left little time for the knotty problems of logic and physics; those problems, after all, simply obscure the truly important questions of moral improvement and the pursuit of the good life. So it is hardly a surprise that Seneca did not devote an entire treatise to the soul, as Aristotle and his Stoic predecessor Chrysippus had done, or investigate human physiology and psychology in a systematic way, despite having ample opportunity to do so in, say, the *Naturales quaestiones*. When he does mention the nature of the soul or body, it is usually in the context of other (usually ethical) discussions; the state of the evidence, therefore, makes it difficult to reconstruct his views on body and soul—if indeed he ever had a thoroughly thought out position on the matter. On analysis, it appears that he is largely an orthodox Stoic who tends to refrain from specifics, but one who can and sometimes does apply independent and critical judgment to certain problems. Thus, it seems methodologically best to proceed by judging Seneca's position against that of his Stoic predecessors—keeping in mind that we are often not as well informed about the earlier Stoics' conception of body and soul as we might like.

Any analysis of body and soul in Seneca must begin with a review of the basic Stoic physical and metaphysical principles that will be discussed in more detail in the chapter "Physics II: Cosmology and Natural Philosophy" by Bardo Maria Gauly, *infra*, pp. 363–378. For just as the cosmos itself was held to be a compound of an active, intelligent, self-moving entity, and a passive, insensate, inert one, so too were human beings thought to be amalgams of active (soul) and passive (body) elements. According to the Stoics, all things within the cosmos operated on the same principles; human beings were no exception.

Like the Epicureans but unlike Plato, the Stoics were committed materialists. What this means, in essence, is that all things that exist are corporeal, and that all events are a result of cause and effect based on corporeal bodies interacting.¹ From a metaphysical standpoint there exists a single underlying substance that operates differently on two principles (*archai*), one active (*to poioun* or *theos/logos*) and one passive (*to paschon* or *hyle*).² The active principle, identified by the Stoics under various names (god, nature, reason, intellect, mind, breath, creative fire, etc.), unifies and gives form to the unqualified passive matter. Both of these principles operate as, or one might say through, corporeal entities, that is, the elements (active = fire, air; passive = earth, water). According to the most developed theory, that of Chrysippus,³ the cosmos was composed of a compound of inert matter and active *pneuma*, a sort of warm vapor that unifies and gives form to unqualified matter by means of physical tension (*tonos* or *tonike kinesis*).⁴ The Stoics explained the cohesive workings of *pneuma* as “tensional movement” or breath “turning back on itself,” consisting of a simultaneous outward and inward flow that creates the tension required for unity.⁵ It is important to note that the active and passive principles are nowhere found in isolation. Both the active principle and inert matter, though discussed as if separate entities, are in fact inseparable in Stoic cosmology. Briefly, “acting upon” and “being acted upon” are two perspectives of the same process, one in which both principles participate.⁶ The distinction made between active and passive principles is merely conceptual.

This pneumatic tension works both on the cosmic scale, holding together the whole cosmos, as well as within individual objects. But not all things are created equal, and *pneuma* works differently in different bodies. There developed in Stoicism, derived from Aristotle’s formulation (*De anima* 2.2 f.), a hierarchy of corporeal objects in which beings were categorized according to more or less sophisticated forms of *pneuma*, the so-called *scala naturae*.⁷ At the most basic level there are inanimate objects that

¹ For Seneca, see *epist.* 106.8, 117.7.

² Diog. Laert. 7.134, 139 (*SVF* 2.299 f.), 7.150 (*SVF* 2.316). See Sambursky 1959, Lapidge 1973, Hahm 1977; for Seneca, see Wildberger 2006.

³ Hahm 1977: 163–169.

⁴ *SVF* 2.441, 444, 448, 451.

⁵ *SVF* 2.442, 451, 452. Specifically, the outward flow contributes form and qualities, the inward flow unity.

⁶ Scarpat 1965: 126–155, Lapidge 1973.

⁷ The *locus classicus* is Origen, *De principiis* 3.1.2 f. (= *SVF* 2.988; cf. 2.989). See Hahm 1977: 164 f., Long 1982: 37–39, Inwood 1985: 18–27, Annas 1992: 51–54, Wildberger 2006, 1: 205–243, Graver 2007: 19–21.

merely have coherence, said to be held together by *pneuma* in the form of *hexis* ("coherence"), for instance a stone or a lump of iron. A more complex form of *pneuma* called *physis* ("growth" or "nature") embodies vegetation, which in addition to coherence has metabolism and may change through growth. Even more sophisticated are animals embodied by soul-*pneuma* (*psyche*), which bestows, in addition to coherence and metabolism, sentience and auto-locomotion. Human beings, as a special class of animals, are endowed with the same powers as mute animals, but their *psyche* operates rationally.

Thus, when we say that according to the Stoics a human being is composed of body and soul, this is just another manifestation of their physical conception of how the world works. The human soul is the active principle, a rarefied and sophisticated kind of *pneuma*, one that unifies, animates, and qualifies the passive body in a specific manner, which endows us with, in addition to the functions of lower forms of being, reason. The soul comes into existence when the animal organism is born⁸ and occupies the same physical space as the body until their separation at death. Galen attributes to Chrysippus a specific definition of soul: "the *pneuma* innate in us, continuous, running through the whole body, so long as the breath of life remains in the body" (*SVF* 2.885; cf. Diog. Laert. 7.156 = *SVF* 2.774, *SVF* 2.778).

To a modern reader the notion that one corporeal form can pass through another, without recourse to void, runs counter to modern scientific axioms. The Stoics explained this process as an example of "complete mixing," whereby two bodies "extend through one another wholly, but in a way that each retains its own substance and qualities," just as fire might pass through iron yet each retain its own essence (*SVF* 2.473).⁹ The human soul, a superfine corporeal body (*soma leptomerēs*, *SVF* 2.780) made of warm air, completely mixes with and gives unity to the heavier corporeal passive elements. In other words, there is no portion of body that is not at one and the same time occupied by soul—just as a stone is fully pervaded by *hexis*. It is worth reiterating that the body is not a vessel or container for the soul (as the Epicureans held), but rather the soul is the substance that holds the

⁸ Two sources, probably derived ultimately from Chrysippus, inform us that the embryo prior to birth is equivalent to vegetation guided by *physis* (Hierocles col. 1.15–28 Bastianini-Long, *Plut. mor.* [= *De Stoic. repug.*] 1052F–1053C). As the fetus approaches birth, the *pneuma* becomes more and more refined, and at birth this refined *pneuma* is either "hardened" (Hierocles) or "cooled" (Chrysippus), resulting in the immediate change from *physis* to *psyche*. If I read *epist.* 124 correctly, Seneca hints at the non-animal nature of the fetus: see *onus* (*epist.* 124.8) and his comparison of plant life (ch. 8, 11); cf. *epist.* 121.17.

⁹ See Annas 1992: 47–50, Long 1982: 38 f., Long 1999: 561 f.

compound together, as Posidonius notes in his criticism of the Epicureans: “it is not bodies which hold souls together, but souls bodies, just as glue controls both itself and what is outside it.”¹⁰

SENECA ON BODY AND SOUL

Seneca, who is an orthodox Stoic in his metaphysical concept of the world (*epist.* 65.2), likewise adheres to the Stoic concept of the *scala naturae* outlined above, as demonstrated in an illustrative passage (*epist.* 58.14):

How do I divide body? Thus: either animate or inanimate. Now, how do I divide animate beings? Thus: certain animate beings have *animus*, others only *anima*; or another way: certain ones have *impetus*, move, and pass through space; others, planted in the soil, are nourished by roots and grow.¹¹

To these categories we may add Seneca’s earlier definition of inanimate objects such as stones as “lacking *anima*” (58.10; cf. *dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].26.4). These classifications correspond, with some variation of terminology, to those found in the Stoic sources outlined above. Those inanimate objects the Stoics said were held together by *hexis* (“coherence”) Seneca calls “lacking *anima*,” the principle of life.¹² Those beings that are guided by *physis* (“growth”) Seneca simply describes as “having *anima*.”¹³ Those more sophisticated living beings (animals) embodied by soul-*pneuma* (*psyche*) are said to have *animus*, the ruling part of the soul, which endows the animal with sentience and auto-locomotion.

Although Seneca does not include humans in this passage, he often comments on the unique position that they hold at the top of the *scala naturae* because of their rational natures. Because their *psyche* operates rationally, they have a share in the divine (*epist.* 65.24): “the position that god holds in this cosmos is the position the soul (*animus*) has in a human being. What is *materia* there, is in us body (*corpus*).” Seneca maintained, just as

¹⁰ Posid. frg. 149 Kidd-Edelstein (trans. Kidd). For Seneca, see *nat.* 2.6.6.

¹¹ *Corpus quomodo divido? ut dicam: aut animantia sunt aut inanima. rursus animantia quemadmodum divido? ut dicam: quaedam animum habent, quaedam tantum animam, aut sic: quaedam impetum habent, incedunt, transeunt, quaedam solo adfixa radicibus aluntur, crescunt.* Cf. *epist.* 76.8–11.

¹² He is aware of the concept of *hexis*: see *nat.* 6.16.1; cf. 2.6.2, 2.6.6.

¹³ Wildberger 2006, 1: 210 suggests that Seneca’s categories here are contaminated with Peripatetic elements (Aristotle thought plant life was *empsychos* “ensouled,” hence *anima*), but Seneca is merely applying the Latin lexicon to Stoic concepts. See further *idem*, 2: 759–760 nn. 1006–1008.

other Stoics did,¹⁴ that the human soul is but a fragment of the cosmic soul. He states that (*epist.* 66.12) “reason is nothing other than a part of the divine *spiritus* sunk into the human body,” and on numerous occasions he notes the soul’s divine origins or divine nature.¹⁵ It is necessary to point out that *all* objects are, according to strict Stoic cosmology, part of and pervaded by cosmic *pneuma* in some form, but there is something intrinsically different about humans, the capacity to reason, that connects them more closely to the completely perfected, fully rational god of the cosmos.

Before pressing on with a closer examination of the human body and soul in Seneca, we should take a moment to reflect on the philosophical lexicon he employs when discussing such matters. Although the physical conception of the Stoic *psyche* outlined *supra* seems clear enough, we shall presently discover that the word “soul” is ambiguous, vague, and often unhelpful. Difficulty arises partly because there is an inherent ambiguity in the Greek word *psyche* generally and in its Stoic use specifically, but also because Latin had at its disposal numerous pre-existing terms for what confers life and mental function on a human being (e.g., *animus*, *anima*, *spiritus*, *mens*). As we have just seen, Seneca shuns *verba e verbis* translations of *hexis* and *physis*, choosing to use the common Latin term *anima* (“breath” as “principle of life”) as the feature differentiating animate from inanimate objects. *Anima* and *animus*, to be sure, had a long life in Latin prior to Seneca¹⁶ and were readily adopted by Latin translators of Greek philosophy. The Epicurean Lucretius, for instance, uses the term *animus* for the controlling center of the soul (located in the heart) but reserves *anima* for the non-sentient soul-material that pervades the rest of the body.¹⁷ Seneca similarly employs the term *animus* for the Stoic concept of the mind as a center of psychic activity (so also *mens*);¹⁸ in some passages he clearly equates it with the Stoic *hegemonikon*, the Stoic directive faculty of the soul located in or around the heart, which

¹⁴ Diog. Laert. 7.143 (= *SVF* 2.633), “from the fact that our soul is a fragment of it [scil. the cosmic soul]”; cf. *SVF* 2.634.

¹⁵ *Dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*) 24.5; 11 (= *cons. Pol.*) 9.8; 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 6.7, 11.6; *epist.* 31.11 (“what else would you call the *animus* but god living in a human body?”), 41.2, 41.5, 79.12, 92.34, 120.14; cf. *nat. 1. pr.* 11. Seneca, interestingly, also applies the soul/body dichotomy to the political structure of emperor/subjects at the beginning of *clem.* 1 (suggesting the divine nature of the emperor’s position?).

¹⁶ See, especially, Reis 1962.

¹⁷ *Lucr.* 3.94 ff. The available Latin lexicon, with its implicit dualism in the terms *animus* and *anima*, easily fit into the Epicurean scheme of the *logikon* and *alogon* parts of the soul. See Lathière 1972, Bailey 1947 ad loc.

¹⁸ See Grimal 1992b.

he occasionally translates with a technical term (*principale*¹⁹). *Anima*, on the other hand, never stands for the ruling part of the soul. It denotes specifically the substance that provides life.²⁰ The essential difference may be gleaned from Seneca's own *sententia* (*epist.* 4.4): *difficile est ... animum perducere ad contemptiōnem animae*, "it is difficult to persuade the mind (*animus*) to regard life (*anima*) lightly" (cf. *nat.* 6.32.4).

The ambiguity in the Stoic use of *psyche* also presents a difficulty. It is one thing to say that according to Stoic physical principles a human is composed of body and soul, quite another to identify exactly how these general physical principles play out in all the complexities of a human organism. Is the *psyche* to be viewed as a singular substance that subsumes *hexis* and/or *physis* in addition to providing sentience, locomotion, and (in humans) rational thought? Or does *pneuma* operate on three different levels independently, with the lower levels of *hexis* and *physis* cooperating somehow with a higher form of soul located in the ruling part? If there was a singular, orthodox position on this question, we cannot recover it. The evidence is ambiguous at best, and it appears that Seneca's Stoic predecessors also wrestled with this problem. Sextus Empiricus (*adv. math.* 7.234, not included in *SVF*) reports that the Stoics used the term *psyche* in two distinct senses, to denote 1) the substance that holds together the whole compound, and 2) specifically the ruling center, i.e., the *hegemonikon* (for convenience, termed soul₁ and soul₂ below). Sextus goes on to explain that the Stoics, when speaking of a human being as a composite of soul and body or describing death as the separation of soul from body, were specifically referring to the soul in the *second* sense.

There is not enough space here to review fully the debate concerning the functions of the *psyche* in early Stoic thought,²¹ but it is sufficiently clear that Seneca regarded soul₂ (the leading part) as distinct from soul₁ (the *pneuma* that held the body together). In his extensive treatment of the various workings of *spiritus* (*pneuma*) in *nat.* 2 he emphasizes that the coherence of human bodies is due to *spiritus* (*corpora nostra inter se cohaerent. quid enim est aliud quod teneat illa quam spiritus?* "our bodies

¹⁹ *Dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).3.7, *epist.* 92.1, 113.23, 121.10 and 13.

²⁰ It is *anima* that is regularly said to leave the body at death (Wildberger 2006, 2: 759 n. 1007); in the few cases where *animus* is said to leave, it is always with the implication of sensation of the event (e.g., *dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*].14.9). Seneca occasionally conflates *anima* and *animus* as the entity that leaves the body at death (see, e.g., *epist.* 57.7–9 and Bero 2006a ad loc.). See also the discussion of Sextus Empiricus below.

²¹ See Bonhöffer 1890: 69, 106 f., Voelke 1965, Long 1982, Inwood 1985: 25 f., Graver 2007: 19–21.

are unified; what else would it be that holds them together other than *spiritus*?": 2.6.6), i.e., *pneuma* as *hexis*. One might argue that this *spiritus* is the same as that which performs the higher psychic functions, but this cannot be right, for later Seneca refers specifically to the *spiritus* "by which the earth is held together and unites its parts and which is also present in stones and dead bodies" (*qui inest etiam saxis mortuisque corporibus: nat. 6.16.1*). What separates dead Caesar from live Caesar is the absence of at least a secondary (*anima*) and perhaps a tertiary (*animus*) level of soul-*pneuma* that either dissipates or leaves the body intact after death. For Seneca, then, the body is not merely unqualified passive matter held together by *spiritus*, but that matter *plus* the *spiritus* that gives coherence and form to that matter. *Anima* further animates and provides the warmth characteristic of living things;²² soul₂ (*animus*) endows the living thing with perception and the impulse to move. Seneca's view on the matter—as far as the evidence suggests—is similar to Long's interpretation of the earlier Stoics' position: the body is "earth and water informed by cohesive and vegetative (soul) *pneuma*, but not specific soul *pneuma*."²³ Since Seneca privileges the ruling part of the soul as the carrier of our identity and the locus of moral responsibility, a clear dualism arises not between soul₁₊₂ and body (inert elements), but between soul₂ and the amalgamation of body and soul₁. Since *spiritus* and *anima* have nothing to do with decision making, they are hardly significant in ethical matters. For all its importance as a life-giving force and its participation in perception and movement, soul₁ might as well be, and was considered by Seneca, just part of the body.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE BODY AND THE SOUL

Despite the layered complexity of the Stoic view of the soul, for sentience and locomotion to occur there has to be some cooperation between the ruling part of the soul (*hegemonikon/animus*) and the rest of the body (inert elements + *spiritus/anima*). There was considerable debate among the Stoics themselves concerning the *psyche* (wholly conceived) and its parts and

²² *Nat.* 2.10.3; see Hahm 1977: 70.

²³ Long 1982: 40, Annas 1992: 55 f.; for a contrary view see Bonhöffer 1890: 69 f., 106, Inwood 1985: 25 f. It would be misleading not to point out here that there may have been (and probably were) competing (or eccentric) views of the soul among Seneca's Stoic predecessors and that Sextus may have been privileging one particular position over another.

faculties, but Zeno's division of it into eight parts became orthodox:²⁴ the ruling part (*hegemonikon*), the parts involving the five senses, and those two parts having to do with voice and reproduction. Of these, the ruling part was said to be located in or around the heart, the other seven being pneumatic outgrowths of and extending out from the ruling part into the body, which the Stoics likened to the tentacles of an octopus.²⁵ Another source calls these branches "perceptive exhalations."²⁶ These subordinate parts are both extensions of soul, and markers of their functionality vis-à-vis the ruling part. For example, the part responsible for the sense of sight connects the eyes to the ruling center, that responsible for hearing leads from the ears, and so on. The Stoic conception of pneumatic branches stretching out from a command center has often been likened to the modern conception of the central nervous system.²⁷

Seneca, however, nowhere engages in an examination of the parts of the soul (he comes closest at *epist.* 90.29), concentrating primarily on the *hegemonikon/animus* as the locus of decision making. Whether he was in fundamental agreement with the (more or less orthodox) view outlined *supra* is impossible to tell, although it stands to reason that this would have been part of his Stoic training. But Seneca's silence on the matter is especially noticeable, and it highlights his preoccupation with the ruling part (*animus*). This is, no doubt, rooted in his privileging of ethical issues. The ruling part, after all, is what ultimately matters when assigning moral or ethical value to actions, since it and it alone is responsible for all decision making. Seneca occasionally provides a glimpse into the physical makeup of the *animus*. It is (*epist.* 50.6) "*spiritus* in a particular state" (Greek πνεῦμα πῶς ἔχον). Elsewhere (*epist.* 57.8) it is noted to be a superfine substance (*ex tenuissimo constat*), more rarefied than fire (*tenuior est igne*), and capable of passing through any corporeal substance (cf. *dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*] 11.6f.). Yet, when all is said and done, not even the stuff nor the whereabouts of the ruling part is truly significant—all that matters is *what* the *animus* does. Consider *epist.* 121.12, one of the many places where Seneca reveals his skepticism: "We know that we have an *animus*; what *animus* is, where it is located, what its nature is, or how it comes to be, we do not know." Again at *nat.* 7.25.2: "that we have an *animus*, which drives us and

²⁴ *SVF* 1.143; 2.827f., 830–833, 836, 874; cf. Sen. *epist.* 92.1.

²⁵ *SVF* 2.836.

²⁶ *SVF* 1.141.

²⁷ E.g., Annas 1992: 61f., Long 1999: 562–572.

holds us back, everyone will admit. What this director and master of us is, however, no one will inform you any more than where it is" (cf. *epist.* 88.34; 90.29).²⁸

Despite Seneca's reluctance to assign a location to the *animus*, the role it plays in his psychology is clear enough. At its most basic level it is the nexus of the physical web of *pneuma* stretching out into the body that endows the organism with perception and locomotion. It is also the physical locus of the constellation of powers that lead to action: perception/presentation, assent, and impulse. Since the physics of action and emotions are discussed by Margaret Graver (*supra*, pp. 257–275), I intend here to focus only on the relationship between the ruling part of the soul and the rest of the organism, beginning with self-perception and the relationship of the hegemonic *animus* and the body of the organism.

Epist. 121 is the most illuminating source for Seneca's view on the relationship between the ruling part of the soul and the rest of the organism. In this letter Seneca, drawing from the theories of the Stoics Archedemus and Posidonius (121.1), argues that all animals, including humans, are aware of their own constitution at birth (*constitutionis suae sensus*: 121.5), a function of the specific physical connection between the ruling part of the soul (soul₂) and the rest of the body. Seneca then provides what is apparently the Stoic definition of *constitutio* (121.10): "the ruling center of the soul in a specific relation to the body."²⁹ This intimate connection explains, for instance, how a bird intuitively knows it has a wing and not an arm, or how animals are able to move all their limbs expeditiously from the moment of birth. It also explains why a toddler will try to stand despite the pain of falling down or why a tortoise that has been flipped over will try to right itself in order to return to its natural disposition (121.8). The constitution of an animal—that is, what the organism fundamentally is at any one time—is intuitively and immediately understood by the ruling part. The ruling part, moreover, is aware of itself (121.12) as the locus of that awareness.

²⁸ Related to Seneca's agnosticism on this point is that he does not venture into the complex physiological relationship among the heart, blood, *pneuma*, *hegemonikon*, and the nerves, nor does he explain how respiration and circulation contribute or fail to contribute to the sustenance of the soul-*pneuma* (although see the suggestive comments at *nat.* 3.15.1f. and 6.14.1). One might compare the agnostic position found at Cic. *ac.* 2.124: *sed redeo ad animum et corpus, satisne tandem ea nota sunt nobis, quae nervorum natura sit, quae venarum? tenemusne quid sit animus, ubi sit?* Cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 1.24.

²⁹ *Constitutio* [...] *principale animi quodam modo se habens erga corpus*; see Inwood 1985: 313 n. 40.

Seneca unfortunately does not analyze this process in detail, but the underlying physical principles can be reconstructed from an invaluable second-century AD papyrus containing Hierocles's account of animalian self-perception,³⁰ an account that has important points of contact with the Senecan letter. Hierocles's *Elements of Ethics* begins with the foundational argument that animals have self-perception at birth. His exposition is thankfully systematic and clear: 1) animals are composites of body and soul, both corporeal and able to be impacted; 2) body and soul are completely mixed, resulting in a mutual "grasp"; 3) the soul stretches outward from and back to the ruling center, striking all the parts of the body, which reciprocates the impact because both entities are corporeal and offer resistance; 4) the resulting experience (*pathos*) from this contact is carried back from the outer parts to the ruling part (*hegemonia*) located in the chest, resulting in *continuous* perception of all parts of both body and soul. This, Hierocles says, is the equivalent of the animal's perceiving itself.³¹ In other words, the animal is aware of itself because of the physical push and pull caused by the physical contact between the corporeal soul and corporeal body constantly registered, even if unconsciously, in the directive faculty of the soul.

Although Seneca nowhere articulates this particular physical construction of the soul, he is clearly committed to a model like that of Hierocles since it forms the underpinning of the concept of *oikeiosis* (see discussion below) he is concerned with in *epist.* 121.³² If, after all, such an awareness of one's constitution—one that is, moreover, constantly changing—is immediately attendant at birth (121.6) and lasts until death (121.15), it follows that there must exist a process whereby the ruling part of the soul is intimately aware of the coextension and specific nature of the body/soul compound to which it belongs.³³ Seneca's position is based on such a physical arrangement even if he does not go into detail here.

³⁰ Bastianini and Long 1992. See Inwood 1984, Long 1993, Graver 2007: 23 f.

³¹ Hierocles col. 4.39–53 B.-L. The term borrowed from modern neurology for such inward-looking self-awareness is "proprioception." See Long 1993: 96–101 with earlier bibliography.

³² For recent commentary on this letter, see Inwood 2007a.

³³ Seneca and Hierocles (col. 5.52–6.24 B.-L.) also agree that self-perception is a prerequisite for the perception of externals (*aisthesis/sensus*). Seneca notes that an animal must "perceive that thing through which they perceive other things as well" (121.12) and that there has to be a point of reference—the self—to which other things are referred (121.17). If, for example, I reach out my hand and touch a book, there must be an awareness of the hand that is doing the touching, and I must be aware that that hand belongs to me. Perception only becomes meaningful when it is self-referential. See Annas 1992: 71 f.

But the animal not only perceives that which belongs to itself, it also naturally feels an attachment to, or one might say ownership of, the body/soul compound, a sense of individuality that separates the organism from everything else around it. This brings us to the important Stoic concept of *oikeiosis*,³⁴ a notoriously slippery term that is variously translated as “appropriation,” “orientation,” or “ownership,” although no single English word adequately expresses the full meaning of the word. In essence, *oikeiosis* is “an animal’s innate disposition to be concerned about and motivated by what belongs to itself.”³⁵ This includes, at the most instinctual level, self-preservation (cf. Cic. *fin.* 3.16 ff.). The Stoics claimed that (Diog. Laert. 7.85 = *SVF* 3.178) “the first impulse of an animal is toward self-preservation, since Nature from the beginning endears the animal to itself.” The same passage of Diogenes quotes Chrysippus verbatim, “the first thing every animal is concerned with [*pro-ton oikeion*] is its own constitution and its awareness of it.” Seneca follows suit (*epist.* 121.21), “each animal cares for its own safety, and it seeks what will benefit it and shrinks from what will harm it” (cf. Epikt. *ench.* 31). For humans, before the onset of rationality at around age fourteen,³⁶ our primary motivation is rather like that of mute animals: we are driven by the natural impulse for survival and thus are concerned primarily with our bodily existence. Once, however, we have become fully mature adults, our constitutions have fundamentally changed, and our primary drive is no longer rooted in biological survival but in the health and preservation of the rational *animus*. In other words, the preservation of our rational selves takes precedence over our bodily selves.

This is an important step, and it has great ethical implications. But despite this new set of ethical priorities centered on the rational *animus*, there remains an innate concern for the body, the residue, perhaps, of that initial impulse toward self-preservation. Seneca opens *epist.* 14 by asserting that there is a natural concern for the body:

³⁴ See discussion of this topic in Pembroke 1971, Inwood 1984: 184–201, Engberg-Pedersen 1990, Long 1993.

³⁵ Long 1993: 97.

³⁶ At birth the human psyche is virtually equivalent to that of a mute animal, whose ruling centers are underdeveloped and non-rational, with one important exception: an infant has the *potential* to become a rational creature. See Seneca *epist.* 124.9, “there is a non-rational creature [mute animal]; another that is not yet rational [infant]; yet another that is rational but not yet consummate” (cf. *epist.* 49.11). Around fourteen, the soul finally becomes mature when “rationality supervenes on the soul as the craftsman of impulse” (Diog. Laert. 7.86), that is, when a human is considered fully rational and so could reasonably be held responsible for her or his actions. Seneca at *epist.* 118.14 calls the infant *irrationalis* but the *pubes rationalis*.

Yes, there is in us an innate affection (*caritas*) for our bodies, and yes, we are their guardians. I am not saying that we should not indulge them, only that we should not be slaves to them [...] (2) we ought to behave not as though we must live because of our bodies, but as though we cannot live without them.

This sentiment that there is a natural, instinctual concern for self-preservation is frequently echoed in Seneca's letters (e.g., 36.8, 82.15, 121.24). But as rational animals we are expected to act accordingly, and other factors take precedence over survival. Although our body might urge us to drink or eat, as a rational agent we may reason that this may not be the appropriate course of action, and we may decide not to take food or drink. Or, although we may wish to preserve our biological lives, it may be more appropriate to preserve our independence and so we will choose to forfeit our life to achieve that end. As Seneca sums up in the letter (*epist.* 14.2), the care of the body should be such that "if reason, dignity, or honor demands it, we are to throw it into flames." As our physical makeup changes and we become fully rational adults, our responsibility shifts from the *corpus* to the *animus*, and one of philosophy's main goals is to turn our attention specifically in that direction.

THE RELATIVE VALUE OF THE BODY AND THE SOUL

The early Stoics, it seems, did not dismiss the body as an unimportant appendage (good health, for instance, was still advantageous, even if secondary to virtue), although they clearly considered it to be inferior to the soul.³⁷ But there is very little to suggest that they denigrated the body³⁸ like later Stoics such as Seneca and Epictetus, who were more willing to emphasize the sort of body/soul dualism advocated by Platonism.³⁹ In *epist.* 65 Seneca emphasizes the supreme importance he places on the soul to the disadvantage of the body.⁴⁰ In opposition to the soul, which he calls "the better" or "best" part of a human being (65.18; cf. *dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].14.2, *epist.* 74.16, 76.9, 78.10; *nat.* 1. *pr.* 14), more powerful and precious (65.23), and naturally superior (65.24),⁴¹ he often degrades the body with great vigor. He defends his contemplation of the natural world by arguing that it "lifts up

³⁷ *SVF* 3.136.

³⁸ The closest we come is at *SVF* 1.529, where the body acts as a "bitter tyrant" demanding daily tribute and threatening disease and death if its needs are not met.

³⁹ See Dobbin 1998: 70 f., on Epict. 1.1.7; cf. Husner 1924: 25–27, Long 2002: 157 f.

⁴⁰ Scarpat 1965: 239–258; most recently Inwood 2007a.

⁴¹ At *epist.* 92.33 the *animus* is regarded as a *procurator* of the "necessary burden" that is the body.

and relieves the soul (*animus*), which, oppressed by its heavy load, desires to free itself [...]. For this body is the soul's (*animus*) burden and punishment; the soul is weighed down by the body's weight and imprisoned" (65.16).⁴² Later in the letter (65.17–24) he calls the body "a grim and murky domicile" that confines and enslaves the soul, and, like Epictetus, refers to his body with the diminutive *corpusculum* ("little body"), a pointed word that will recur twice in the next letter.⁴³ The body can blunt the powers of the mind (*dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].10.1, 20.2; *epist.* 15.2, 58.33, 88.19), but if properly trained the *animus* can remain agile despite the loss of bodily vigor (*epist.* 30.13, 66 *passim*).

Seneca's low estimation of the body's value can be seen when he expatiates on the free will of a slave despite his legal status (*benef.* 3.20.1):

Whoever thinks that slavery penetrates the whole man is mistaken. The better part of him is exempt. Our bodies are subject to and awarded to masters, but the mind (*mens*) is wholly independent: so free and unshackled is it that it cannot be confined by this prison in which it is enclosed such that it is prevented from using its own impulse. [...]⁴⁴

The body—i.e., inert elements + soul₁—has no bearing on the freedom or quality of the person, here identified entirely with the ruling part of the soul. A person's worth is equivalent to the quality of the *animus* (*epist.* 76.32): "if you want to determine the true worth of a person and get to know what sort of man he is, inspect him naked: forget his estate, forget his honors and all of Fortune's deceptive gifts, let him even shed his very body—inspect his soul (*animus*), its quality, its capacity, whether it is great on its own or because of some external factor." Departing from traditional Roman values, Seneca argues that the same *animus* can be present in an *eques*, a *libertinus*, or a *servus* (*epist.* 31.11). The body is nothing more than clothing; even the most beautiful garment cannot cover up an inferior body (*epist.* 92.13). Seneca's position is comparable to what we find later in Epictetus, who, as Long in his

⁴² Body as prison: *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*).20.2, 11 (= *cons. Pol.*).9.3, 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).11.7, *epist.* 102.30; cf. Plat. *Phaid.* 62B.

⁴³ *Corpusculum* as a derogatory word: *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).11.7, *benef.* 4.13.1, *epist.* 23.6, 24.16–18, 41.4, 58.29. I regard the cluster of letters 65–66 (as well as 23–24) as bound tightly to each other around this theme; Claranus in *epist.* 66 offers a positive *exemplum* of the theme "the independence of the mind from the body" treated in the previous letter. See Maurach 1970: 137 f.; Scarpit 1965: 72. For an extensive treatment of Seneca's metaphorical descriptions of the body (slave, domicile, cave, vessel, clothing, etc.) see Husner 1924.

⁴⁴ *Errat, si quis existimat servitutem in totum hominem descendere. pars melior eius excepta est. corpora obnoxia sunt et adscripta dominis; mens quidem sui iuris, quae adeo libera et vaga est, ut ne ab hoc quidem carcere, cui inclusa est, teneri queat, quominus impetu suo utatur.*

recent treatment notes (2002: 157), “frequently denigrates our ‘bodily’ aspect, often calling the body a corpse or mud or earth, and using diminutives ‘little flesh’ or ‘little body.’” This condemnation of the body is, of course, part and parcel of elevating the soul as the true self that has autonomy and is free from all externals. In his programmatic first *Discourse*, Epictetus outlines the differences between “what is up to us” (*ta eph’ hemin*) and what lies outside our power. External forces we cannot control; what we are in control of is our mind. So strong is the identification of the *animus* as the true “self” that Seneca can write (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].19.1), “[do we not want to learn] where nature will settle us [*nos*] when we have been sent from our bodies?”

This mind/body dualism found in Seneca should not be confused with psychological dualism, wherein there are separate, competing powers or faculties in the soul itself (such as those articulated by Plato or Aristotle), which could produce conflicting impulses to action. In his clearest exposition of the question,⁴⁵ Seneca fits squarely within the orthodox Stoic view that the *animus* (*hegemonikon*) is a solitary faculty and is alone responsible for human action. Whether someone is guided by right reason or passion is not a matter of one impulse overpowering another, or of accepting one impulse over another, but of the current state of the rational soul.

Yet it is easy to conflate the mind/body dualism with psychological dualism in Seneca’s case, for example at *epist.* 71.27:⁴⁶

I do not remove him [*illum*, scil. the *sapiens*] from the category of humanity, nor do I say that he is impervious to pain like some cliff that does not admit any feeling. I remember that he is composed of two parts. One is non-rational; this is bitten, burns, and feels pain. The other is rational; this has unshakeable opinions, is fearless and unconquerable.⁴⁷

Yet, despite lexical appearances (*pars rationalis/inrationalis*), this has nothing to do with an irrational part of the soul (*animus*). The *pars inrationalis* refers, as Seneca himself later notes (71.29: note the repetition of the verb *dolere*), to the *body* and not a separate faculty of the *animus*: *et tremet sapiens et dolebit et expallescet; hi enim omnes corporis sensus sunt* (“the *sapiens* will tremble and pain and grow pale, for all of these are sensations of the body”). Once

⁴⁵ *Dial.* 3 (= *de ira* 1).8.1f., discussed in full by Graver (*supra*, pp. 268f.); see also Inwood 1993.

⁴⁶ Zöller 2003: 134; so, apparently, Pohlenz 1948–1949: 308, Ganss 1952: 32.

⁴⁷ The key sentence: *Memini ex duabus illum partibus esse compositum: altera est inrationalis, haec mordetur, uritur, dolet; altera rationalis, haec inconcussas opiniones habet, intrepida est et indomita*. It is important to note in this discussion that *illum* refers specifically to the *sapiens*, not his *animus* as Zöller (*supra* n. 46) takes it.

one recognizes the important distinction between *animus* (soul₂) and body (inert elements + *spiritus* and *anima*), all apparent difficulty disappears.⁴⁸ The *animus* is the power that controls what we could call *voluntary* action.⁴⁹ The body may be responsible for feeling pain (registered, of course, in the *animus*), but the *sapiens* will not be influenced by that pain, and will instead act in accordance with his *inconcussae opinionones* despite it.

DEATH AND THE SURVIVAL OF THE SOUL

Death occurs at the moment when the soul and body separate. Chrysippus, like Plato, speaks simply of the “separation of the soul from the body” (*SVF* 2.604, 790, 815; cf. 1.137, 146, Plat. *Phaid.* 67D), and at the time of the soul’s departure the animal is said to cease living and become merely a corpse. Seneca defines death specifically as “the moment when the *anima* departs from the body” (*quo [tempore] anima discedit a corpore: dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].6.9),⁵⁰ but he also vividly portrays the soul “bursting forth” and escaping through any earthly substance (*erumpit; [...] animo [...] per omne corpus fuga est: epist.* 57.8; cf. *dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*].23.2).⁵¹ The soul is occasionally said to escape through the mouth or a wound, but the latter instance of this may be no more than a *bon mot*.⁵² This notion of the soul actively “leaving” the body may be a reflection of Seneca’s metaphysical conception of the soul as a portion of the divine: it is an active, vigorous entity always in motion, striving to return to the place from which it descended.

⁴⁸ See further Hadot 1969: 91f., Kidd 1988: 666 *ad* frg. 184, Inwood 2007a.

⁴⁹ Seneca provides an extensive list of the kinds of responses that are involuntary, many of which are purely bodily (see *dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].2.1–5, 3.2, 4.2; *epist.* 57.4), e.g., shivers caused by freezing water or revulsion at the touch of certain objects. That the *sapiens* will feel pain is a natural and physical response to, say, being cut by a sharp knife, just as the *animus* cannot completely block out a loud, crashing noise—both the cut and the noise register as physical alterations of soul₂. What is “up to the *sapiens*,” however, is the response to the cut or noise. More difficult to explain are the involuntary affectations that we would describe as mental in nature; see Graver’s discussion (*supra*, pp. 257–275). Because of space constraints I have here omitted discussion of the “will” in Seneca, whether it was a separate faculty of the soul (termed “traditional will” by Inwood 2000) or simply an index for multiple functions of the mind (“summary will”): I refer the reader to Pohlenz 1941: 112–118, Gilbert 1963, Rist 1969: 219–232, Voelke 1973: 161–190, Dihle 1982: esp. 134f., Kahn 1988, Inwood 2000, Zöller 2003.

⁵⁰ Cf. *nat.* 2.59.3. See also n. 20 *supra*.

⁵¹ Seneca perhaps plays with this idea when describing Claudius’ death at *apoc.* 4.2–3; see Weinreich 1923: 53–55.

⁵² *Dial.* 5 (= *de ira* 3).19.4, *epist.* 76.33, 95.72; cf. Ps.-Quint. *decl.* 2.18.20.

The separation of the soul from the body is instantaneous (*momentum* at *epist.* 24.9; cf. 77.13), so much so that it is imperceptible (*brevius est quam ut sentiri tanta velocitas possit: dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].6.9). Although Seneca vehemently denies that anyone could know the nature of death (*epist.* 91.21), he was fascinated with the idea. With great admiration he records Julius Canus's desire at the moment of death "to observe, at that swiftest of moments, whether the *animus* senses that it is departing" (*dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*].14.9). At *epist.* 30 he likewise reports eagerly listening to the Epicurean Bassus, in the throes of old age and with an infirm body, dissertating on death, speculating that it would come without sensation, for it was implausible that death, which led to non-sensation, would itself be sensible (30.5 f., 9, 13 f.).

A reconstruction of Seneca's view concerning the fate of the soul after its separation from the body is elusive, for Seneca nowhere provides us with a systematic account and often presents conflicting claims about the survival of the soul. René Hoven has categorized four distinct strains of thought concerning the fate of the soul after death in Seneca's writings:⁵³ 1) the soul survives for a limited time (orthodox Stoicism?); 2) death is either an end or a transition (the Socratic alternative); 3) death is non-existence (Epicurean); and 4) after death the soul strives to return to its divine origin and/or returns in new bodies (a sort of Pythagorean/Platonic mysticism). These differing claims are doubtless a function of Seneca's reluctance to commit to a position on an unknowable subject that has little relevance (in his mind, at least) to ethical questions—compare his reluctance to commit to a locus for the *animus* noted above.

It should be pointed out, if Seneca himself did not present a singular, confident view of the afterlife, neither did his Stoic predecessors, who were not in agreement concerning the soul's survival after death. Diogenes Laertius (7.157 = *SVF* 2.811) records the differing opinions of Cleanthes, who argued that all souls survived until the *ekpyrosis* (the great conflagration), and of Chrysippus, who limited survival to the souls of the wise, presumably because of their stronger pneumatic tension. Another text (*SVF* 2.815) provides the detail that Chrysippus believed that after death the soul becomes spherical. The school's founder, Zeno, also held that souls survived after separation from the body, calling the soul (*SVF* 1.146) "long-lived *pneuma* [...]" but not wholly immortal; for the soul is worn away into oblivion by the long span of time." Unfortunately, a lacuna in the text makes it impossible to determine exactly what Zeno thought happens to the soul after the separation. The positions

⁵³ Hoven 1971: 109–126. See also Motto 1955a, Setaioli 1997a.

of later Stoics on the matter are even harder to determine. Panaetius seems to have argued for the mortality of the soul (frg. 83 van Straaten = Test. 120 Alesse; cf. Diog. Laert. 7.156 [= *SVF* 2.774], where individual souls are said to be “subject to destruction”), but whether this denies a limited survival of souls after the separation of body and soul is controversial.⁵⁴ The position of Posidonius is even less clear, resting on one much disputed passage, Cicero, *div.* 1.64 (= frg. 108 Edelstein-Kidd). It was also once fashionable to claim that Posidonius advanced a highly mystical eschatology, which lies behind Cic. *Tusc.* 1, the *Somnium Scipionis*, Verg. *Aen.* 6, as well as Sen. *cons. Marc.* (*dial.* 6) and *epist.* 102.⁵⁵ But in the absence of definitive evidence for Posidonius's view it is more profitable to treat each of these texts on its own merits.

In Seneca's case, rhetorical aims and literary ambition may, and often do, take precedence over maintaining internally consistent views. Such is the case of *cons. Marc.*⁵⁶ Just chapters after Seneca firmly claims that death is equivalent to non-existence (*nihil est et omnia in nihilum redigit*: 19.5; cf. *epist.* 54.4), he embarks on an eloquent and elaborate mystical depiction of a young son's soul rising to meet his ancestors. This passage has a clear rhetorical objective, aimed at consoling Marcia at the passing of her young son, Metilius. It recalls the *Somnium Scipionis* and the Platonic concepts therein, but with some considerable divergences which render these conventional sentiments compatible with Stoicism.

In the consolation Seneca asserts that Metilius's early death is actually a boon since his short time on earth means that his soul will be less contaminated by contact with the body: “[those who die early] have only carried a little filth, a little burden with them” (23.1). Seneca later resumes this line of thought: Metilius is in a better station, everlasting, freed from his terrestrial bonds and the bodily stain that had accrued while he was alive (24.5–25.2);⁵⁷ for a short time he will remain above us while he is cleansed of his mortal filth, after which he will be carried aloft to “run with the blessed

⁵⁴ The vast majority of scholars incline to the view that Panaetius's position was that the soul perished at death, but recently the case has been reopened: see Alesse 1997: 255 f. for bibliography for and against.

⁵⁵ For a thorough review of the scholarship until 1971, see Hoven 1971: 95–102; cf. Reinhardt 1921: 471–474. For a concise argument against Posidonian influence for the *cons. Marc.* see Manning 1981: 133–135; cf. Reinhardt 1921: 471–474, Favez 1928: xxxv–xlvi. See also Bocciolini Palagi 1979 on *epist.* 102.

⁵⁶ One also sees the same conflict within the first two choral odes in *Troades*; the nihilism of the second ode, which espouses the Epicurean notion of non-existence, cannot be said to represent Seneca's own thoughts on the matter.

⁵⁷ Plat. *Phaid.* 66B–C, 80E–81C, 82C, 83D. At *nat.* 6.32.6 Seneca reports that upon death “a better and safer place awaits” the dead.

souls (*animas*)” and be met by the sacred assembly composed of Scipios and Catos. The Platonic influences, especially from the *Phaedo*, are clear,⁵⁸ but Seneca’s purgation is preparation for an extended afterlife and not for rebirth.⁵⁹ Seneca has also molded his account to include the *ekpyrosis*, the great conflagration during which all elements are reduced to pure fire.⁶⁰

Does this passage commit Seneca to anything more than literary ambition? Hardly. Nor can it be said that it represents his view of the afterlife. Seneca remains firmly non-committal to any particular view—betraying that uncertainty so famously articulated in the Socratic alternative found in the *Apology* (40C) and which is tersely summarized by Seneca himself: “What is death? Either an end or a transition” (*mors quid est? aut finis aut transitus*: *epist.* 65.24; cf. 93.10, *dial.* 1 [= *prov.*] 6.6). Elsewhere he elaborates (*epist.* 24.18): “death either consumes us or frees us; if we are freed, the better part remains with its burden taken away; if consumed, nothing remains, and our benefits as well as our troubles have been removed.” It is Seneca’s wont to discuss the soul’s survival in purely *hypothetical* terms (e.g., either X or Y; if the soul survives, then Z).⁶¹ His main point concerning death is simply this: whether the soul survives or not, we are freed from the suffering that is attendant on our bodily existence.⁶² If it is productive to reduce Seneca’s belief in the afterlife, it may well be summed up as “a mixture of doubt and desire to believe.”⁶³ But no more than that.

CONCLUSION

The evidence suggests the following conclusions: 1) Seneca does not systematically investigate the physiology of the human body or analyze the physical nature of the soul, refusing even to commit to a location for the *animus*. 2) He was nevertheless familiar with and followed the basic Stoic conception of the physical structure of body and soul (i.e., passive/active elements). 3)

⁵⁸ Plat. *Phaid.* 113E–114A, *Gorg.* 524E ff., *rep.* 10.614A ff.; cf. Cic. *rep.* 6.29, Verg. *Aen.* 6.738–745.

⁵⁹ Occasionally Seneca toys with the idea of metempsychosis (*epist.* 102.24, 108.19 ff.).

⁶⁰ Some have ascribed such an eschatological view to Posidonius (e.g., Abel 1964), but this seems unnecessary given the context. It seems to me especially difficult to accept Posidonian influence here for two reasons: 1) at 23.2 Seneca cites Plato by name and clearly alludes to *Phaid.* 64A and 67D; 2) the reference to the Scipios (along with other echoes) clearly points to the strong literary influence the *Somnium Scipionis* had on Seneca’s consolation. If Posidonius is at work here (which is not at all clear), it is through the intermediary of the Ciceronian text.

⁶¹ Cf. *epist.* 57.7–9 (57.7 = *SVF* 2.820) and Berno 2006a ad loc.

⁶² *Dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*) 19.4 f., *benef.* 7.1.7, *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*) 9.2, *epist.* 99.29 f., *nat.* 6.32.12.

⁶³ Leeman 1951: 177. Cf. I. Hadot 1969: 91 with n. 74.

Seneca accepts that there are different levels of *spiritus/pneuma* at work in the human organism (without exploring the physics of the relationship). 4) The “body” was considered to be the inert elements + *spiritus* (that held together the organism) and *anima* (that which provides life). 5) This creates a physical dualism between body (in the above sense) and *animus*, reflecting Seneca’s ethical interest in distinguishing purely natural/involuntary action from voluntary action, that is, “what is up to us.” 6) Platonic influences can be detected in Seneca’s degradation of the body and the elevation of the *animus*; whether this was part of the early Stoics’ view, was owed to an intermediary like Panaetius or Posidonius, or was Seneca’s own contribution cannot be ascertained. Finally, 7) appropriate actions are predicated on the physical constitution of a human organism; the fully rational adult is to be concerned with his rational, not biological life.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ I should like to thank Professors Stephen Brunet and Margaret Graver for many helpful suggestions and criticisms. Naturally, all remaining infelicities are mine and mine alone.

PHYSICS II: COSMOLOGY AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

Bardo Maria Gauly

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The ancient Stoics distinguished between three areas of philosophy: ethics, physics, and logic; the Greek terms τὸ ἠθικόν, τὸ φυσικόν, τὸ λογικόν (Diog. Laert. 7.39 = LS 26B) are rendered into Latin by Seneca as *philosophia moralis*, *naturalis*, and *rationalis* (*epist.* 89.9): *Prima componit animum; secunda rerum naturam scrutatur; tertia proprietates verborum exigit et structuram et argumentationes, ne pro vero falsa subrepant.* (“The first gets the soul into shape, the second inquires into the nature of the world, and the third clarifies the specific meaning of words and their linking into a line of argument; this will prevent false assumptions from insinuating themselves as true ones.”)

Two alternative divisions quoted by Diogenes Laertius show that the Stoics subsumed under the term physics not only topics classed as natural philosophy today, but also questions we would assign to metaphysics. The first division, which Diogenes calls “the specific one” (εἰδικῶς), lists teachings about bodies, principles, elements, gods, boundaries, space, and the void; the second division, the generic one (γενικῶς), comprises doctrines of the world, the elements and the causes.¹

In this article, I will first discuss natural philosophy in general, which deals with everything that exists or subsists (metaphysics), and then cosmology, which inquires into the existing world order.

According to the Old Stoics, all three parts of philosophy should be considered an organic unity. The whole of philosophy is sometimes compared to a living creature, logic corresponding to the bones, ethics to the flesh, and physics to the soul. In another simile, philosophy is viewed as a fertile field, logic as surrounding fences, ethics as fruit, and physics as soil or

¹ Diog. Laert. 7.132 = LS 43B. The only classification of physics in Seneca resembles the specific one of Diogenes (*epist.* 89.16): The first division is made between non-bodies and bodies; bodies are, in turn, divided into the creating force and the resulting elements. According to certain philosophers, as Seneca points out, the topic of the elements is divided into matter, the cause of all things, and the elements themselves.

trees. These comparisons do not clarify which topic should be studied first or which is the most important, and Diogenes Laertius, who hands them down to us, informs us that there were different opinions within the school.² According to Plutarch, Chrysippus not only claimed that the course of studies should begin with logic, continue with ethics, and end with physics, but also declared theology to be the last and holiest topic of physics and philosophy as a whole by calling it τελεταί ("initiatory mysteries").³ As for the later Stoics Panaetius and Posidonius, physics came first within the curriculum (Diog. Laert. 7.41 = LS 26B), but only for Panaetius does this seem to imply that it was considered less important.⁴ When we come to the Romans, we are confronted with the almost unanimously held conviction that Roman philosophers in general and Seneca in particular confine themselves to teaching moral philosophy for practical purposes and that they neglect physics.⁵ But even if there is some truth in this, there is something to be said about the way in which Seneca expounds the worth of physics.

For a Stoic, physics is closely connected to ethics because human action aims at living in accordance with nature. The meaning of this maxim is not self-evident, since it could relate either to the nature of the world or to man's own nature. The Stoics, however, seeing man's rational soul as part of or a reflection of the order of the cosmos did not seem to worry about this possible ambiguity; nor did Seneca.⁶ Despite this strong link between human action and nature, the formula of living in accordance with nature, which is often referred to in the *Dialogi* or the *Epistulae morales*,⁷ is never

² Diog. Laert. 7.39–41 = LS 26B. A third comparison (ibid.) makes philosophy an egg, whose shell is logic, whose white is ethics, and whose yolk is physics.

³ Plut. *mor.* 1035A–B = SVF 2.42 = LS 26C. But Diogenes Laertius makes him put logic first, physics second, and ethics third (7.40 = LS 26B).

⁴ Rist 1969: 174 f. (about Panaetius); Posidonius's wide learning in the study of nature is at variance with the assumption that he could have had a low opinion of physics.

⁵ Donini calls it "one of the most successful *fables convenues* in Classical studies" (1988: 26). For example, one could cite Lapidge 1978: 184 f.

⁶ Grimal 1978c: 252 f.; cf. Gill 2006: 150 f. Both interpretations are to be found in his writings; cf. *epist.* 104.23: *Gloriosum et excelsum spiritum [scil. natura dedit] quaerentem ubi honestissime, non ubi tutissime vivat, simillimum mundo, quem quantum mortalium passibus licet sequitur aemulaturque.* ("Nature gave us a glorious and high spirit, which seeks to live as honestly, not as safely as possible, closely resembling the world, which it follows and emulates as far as its mortal steps allow.") *Dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).3.3: *Beata est ergo vita conveniens naturae suae.* ("Happy is, therefore, life according to its own nature.") For the Old Stoics, see Diog. Laert. 7.87–89 = LS 63C.

⁷ E.g., Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).8.1 f., *epist.* 5.4, 41.8, 45.9.

mentioned in his only work on natural philosophy, the *Naturales quaestiones*.⁸ But even if the nature of their relationship is never discussed at length, both physics and ethics are highly esteemed by Seneca, in particular when compared to logic, which is discarded as a waste of time (e.g., *epist.* 49.5). Their relative values are not easy to determine, since there are different estimations within Seneca's writings. Even in the works on moral philosophy there are passages that show great respect for cosmological speculation (*epist.* 95.10): *Philosophia autem et contemplativa est et activa: spectat simul agitque. Erras enim si tibi illam putas tantum terrestres operas promittere: altius spirat. 'Totum' inquit 'mundum scrutor nec me intra contubernium mortale contineo, suadere vobis aut dissuadere contenta: magna me vocant supraque vos posita.'* ("Philosophy is theoretical and practical; at the same time it is watching and taking action. For you are wrong if you think that it promises only earthly work; its spirit aims higher. 'I am inquiring', it says, 'into the whole world and I am not confining myself to living with man, content to give you advice or warning: Great things soaring above you are inviting me.'")⁹ This high esteem is regularly connected with cosmology (not physics in general), and, more specifically, with contemplation of the heavens and the stars, with reflection on the divine realms and their secrets.¹⁰ By contrast, when discussing the Stoic doctrine of the corporality of the virtues, Seneca ends by disavowing such musing: As with the study of logic, the preoccupation with the niceties of the physical principles is said to be worthless inasmuch as it does not help the man who strives for virtue.¹¹

⁸ There are, to be sure, epilogues or digressions giving moral advice, but these are loosely attached to the treatises on natural phenomena; for this problem, see Gaulty 2004: 87–134.

⁹ Cf. Althoff 2005: 18: "Der ethische Nutzen der Philosophie erscheint hier also erstaunlicherweise abgewertet gegenüber der reinen physikalischen Forschung."

¹⁰ Cf. Sen. *nat.* 1 pr. 1–4, where only two areas of philosophy are contrasted with each other, moral philosophy and theology, which is then conceived as cosmology. A higher value is put on theology (§ 1): *Altior est haec et animosior* ("This is nobler and bolder.") The questions that theology seeks to answer are these (§ 3): *quae universi materia sit, quis auctor aut custos, quid sit deus, totus in se tendat an et ad nos aliquando respiciat, faciat cotidie aliquid an semel fecerit, pars mundi sit an mundus [...]*. ("What is the matter of the universe, who is its creator or guard, what is god, is he confining his attention to himself or does he sometimes take care of us, is he doing something daily or has he completed his work once and for all, is he part of the world or the world itself?") It is reflection on these problems that makes life worth living (§ 4): *Nisi ad haec admittere, non fuerat operae pretium nasci*. The identification of cosmology and theology recalls Chrysippus's words on theology being the culmination of physics (Plut. *mor.* 1035A–B = SVF 2.42 = LS 26C).

¹¹ It is compared to playing a game (*epist.* 106.11): *Latrunculis ludimus. In supervacuis subtilitas teritur: non faciunt bonos ista sed doctos*. ("We are playing board games. Subtlety is wasted on unnecessary things that do not render you good, but learned.")

Technical discussions about details of terminology or categorization are disapproved of, contemplation of the marvels and order of the world are viewed as edifying.

One last preliminary remark: Seneca has not written a systematic discourse on natural philosophy as a whole. The *Naturales quaestiones*, the only work that deals with topics from physics, discusses only some portions of cosmology. The Stoic doctrines of the principles of physics are never presented in an orderly way. This does not mean that Seneca did not know them, but that he was more concerned with understanding the world as it exists and with guiding man to virtue. Therefore, if we want to reconstruct the way Seneca thinks of physics and cosmology, we often have to examine passages dispersed throughout his works. Even so, it is difficult to get a clear picture of his ideas.

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This is true in particular with regard to the basic doctrines of physics; there is next to nothing in Seneca's writing about crucial points of Stoic metaphysics as the theory of principles. Only when discussing Platonic and Peripatetic tenets of causality does Seneca comment on cause as a Stoic principle (*epist.* 65.2 = LS 55E = SVF 2.303): *Dicunt, ut scis, Stoici nostri duo esse in rerum natura ex quibus omnia fiant, causam et materiam. Materia iacet iners, res ad omnia parata, cessatura si nemo moveat; causa autem, id est ratio, materiam format et quocumque vult versat, ex illa varia opera producit. Esse ergo debet unde fiat aliquid, deinde a quo fiat: hoc causa est, illud materia.* ("Our Stoics say, as you know, that there are two things in the world through which everything comes into existence, cause, and matter. Matter lies inert, ready for everything, but resting as long as nobody puts it in motion; cause, however, i.e., reason, forms matter and turns it into whatever it likes, thereby producing a variety of creations. These are thus inevitably generated from something and by something; the latter is cause, the former matter.") The relation of matter to cause is then explained by a comparison; since human art imitates nature, the bronze that is formed into a statue corresponds to matter, the artist who shapes it corresponds to cause (*epist.* 65.3).

This is a correct, if sketchy account of the Stoic principles. As for matter, the passive principle, Seneca's translation of the Greek adjective ἄποιος (e.g., Diog. Laert. 7.134 = LS 44B), which has often been understood to signify "unqualified" (e.g., by LS), suggests a different meaning, viz. "inert," "not

active.”¹² Neither here nor elsewhere does Seneca seem to be interested in elucidating the notion of matter more thoroughly.¹³ He has far more to say about the active principle, which he calls “cause” or “reason” in *epist.* 65.2. The body of the letter argues first against Aristotle’s four types of causes, then against Plato, who is said to “add” a fifth type, the idea.¹⁴ Since matter is simple, Seneca continues, cause must be simple, too; thus he reduces the Academic and Peripatetic variety of causes to one cause only, the efficient cause, which he defines as “reason” or “God.”¹⁵ The identification of the active principle with God is repeated near the end of the letter in order to teach a moral lesson (*epist.* 65.23 f.), the subordination of the human body to the soul (§ 23): *Potentius autem est ac pretiosius quod facit, quod est deus, quam materia patiens dei.* (“But more powerful and valuable is that which acts, viz. God, than matter, which is acted upon by God.”) One passage of the *Naturales quaestiones* goes further, giving a long list of terms that are supposed to be synonymous: Iuppiter is called not only *rector custosque universi*, but also *causa causarum*, which makes him identical with the active principle as defined in *epist.* 65.¹⁶

The Stoic doctrine of the corporality of the principles provides the premise of such an identification. Both reason and matter are bodies, because only bodies are able to act or to be acted upon.¹⁷ But since both principles are theoretically inseparable it seems more accurate to speak of two aspects of one substance (Lapidge 1978: 163 f.). Seneca never mentions the tenet of the corporality of the principles, but when he comes to discuss the question as to

¹² Todd 1978: 140 f. For a discussion of the Aristotelian origin of the Stoic doctrine of principles, see Scarpat’s commentary on Seneca’s letter (1965: 93–95).

¹³ As Chalcidius does in his version of Zeno’s doctrine (*comm. in Plat. Tim.* 292 = LS 44D): Matter is the substratum of everything existing; it is finite and subject to change, and it is neither generated nor bound to perish; cf. Diog. Laert. 7.134 = LS 44B. For another concept of matter in Seneca, see *nat.* 2.3 f. (matter opposed to “parts” of nature) and Hine’s commentary: “perhaps [...] a debased descendant of the Aristotelian and Stoic doctrine” (1981: 164).

¹⁴ *Epist.* 65.4–14. The surprising identification of Aristotle’s second cause with the *opifex* (artist), i.e., the δημιουργός, seems to be due to the following comparison with an artist (Dörrie and Baltes 1996: 415 f.). *Epist.* 65 has, together with *epist.* 58, aroused a lively debate about its sources and its Platonic affiliations; see Bickel 1960, Dillon 1977: 135–139, Donini 1979: 151–208, Setaioli 1988: 126–140, Chaumartin 1993b, Isnardi Parente 1995, Küppers 1996, and Gauly 2004: 164–170.

¹⁵ *Epist.* 65.12: *Quaerimus quid sit causa? Ratio scilicet faciens, id est deus.* (“If we want to know what cause is, the answer is: reason, viz. God.”)

¹⁶ *Nat.* 2.45; arguing against the false assumption of the punishing god, Seneca creates the idea of Iuppiter as ruler of the universe, spirit of the world, fate, providence, first cause, and nature itself.

¹⁷ Diog. Laert. 7.134 = LS 44B (*si vera lectio*), Cic. *ac.* 1.39 = LS 45A, Aristocl. ap. Eus. *Pr. Ev.* 15.14.1 = LS 45G.

whether good is corporeal, he quotes the teachings of anonymous Stoics that everything active is a body, a reasoning that he dismisses as useless (*epist.* 106.3–12).

Seneca nowhere defines what a body is, but he shares the Stoic criterion for recognizing a body, viz. the ability to produce or feel an effect (*epist.* 106.3 and 106.8).¹⁸ Since everything existing is a body (including air), the movement of bodies requires an explanation; while the Epicureans taught the movement of atoms in the void, the Stoics developed the doctrine of ἀντιπερίστασις, which resembles the modern theory of displacement. Arguing for the unity of the air, Seneca explains this (*nat.* 2.7.2) by referring to fluids *quae sic corpora accipiunt ut semper in contrarium acceptis refluant* (“that take up bodies and replace them by constantly flowing back in the opposite direction”). Accordingly, there is no void within the existing world, but there is or may be one outside of the world.¹⁹

The void, which is beyond the cosmos, forms one of four ontological classes of the incorporeal. The others are the λεκτόν (“the sayable”), space, and time (LS 27D). These are to be considered as subsistent, not existent.²⁰ In *epist.* 58.8–14, however, Seneca gives an account of ontology in which he contrasts bodies and the incorporeal before he subdivides the bodies into living and non-living beings; the living ones are in turn divided into animals and plants, and so on. By subsuming all these (including the incorporeal) under the highest class, *quod est* (Seneca’s translation of the Greek τὸ ὄν), Seneca diverges from Stoic orthodoxy, which would contrast the incorporeal and the existing, classifying both under the heading of τί (*quid*, “something”).²¹

We are therefore bound to distinguish two Stoic concepts of the world, first, the existing cosmos, and, second, the universe, which comprises the cosmos and the void around it.²² The cosmos is a rationally structured unity. This unity is assured by a sort of warming and invigorating power, which Zeno and Cleanthes identified as fire, more precisely as πῦρ τεχνικόν

¹⁸ In *epist.* 102.6 several classes of bodies are distinguished: *continua corpora* (like man), *composita* (like a ship), and *ex distantibus* (like an army); for these types and for different connections between bodies (as in *nat.* 2.2.1–4), see Wildberger 2006: 7–11.

¹⁹ *Dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).5.6: ‘*Illud*’ inquit ‘*scrutor quod ultra mundum iacet, utrumne profunda vastitas sit an et hoc ipsum terminis suis cludatur*.’ (“‘I explore,’ says he [man following his rational nature], ‘what lies beyond the world, asking if it is deep void or if even this space is confined by its own limits.’”) Cf. Lapidge 1978: 177, Wildberger 2006: 100–102.

²⁰ For this distinction, see LS 1.163 f.

²¹ In *epist.* 58.15 Seneca speaks of “certain Stoics,” who give another definition of *quid* that comprises existing and imaginative entities. Why Seneca has conceived a different ontological scheme, is open to discussion; see Wildberger 2006: 94–99.

²² Wildberger 2006: 3; cf. Furley 1999: 412.

(LS 47C = Cic. *nat.* 2.23–30).²³ Chrysippus modified the theory by establishing πνεῦμα, consisting of fire and air, as the animating principle. This spirit permeates all bodies and gives them their inner tension and unity.²⁴ It is the active principle, God, which—or who—operates in and by means of the πνεῦμα. Seneca follows Chryrippus, rendering πνεῦμα as *spiritus* (“spirit”). When he is pondering the question to whom man owes the beauties of nature (*dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*].8.3), he mentions, in addition to God, reason or fate the *divinus spiritus per omnia maxima ac minima aequali intentione diffusus* (“the divine spirit that permeates everything great and small with even tension”). He is more explicit in the *Naturales quaestiones*, where he is pleading the unity of the air against the atomists. Having cited several phenomena (like the production of sounds by the tongue), which can only be explained by the theory of tension (2.6.3–5), he arrives at the effects that the tension of air has within individual bodies (2.6.6):

Esse autem unitatem in aëre vel ex hoc intellegi potest, quod corpora nostra inter se cohaerent. quid enim esset aliud quod teneret illa quam spiritus? quid est aliud quo animus noster agitur? quis esset illi motus nisi intentio? quae intentio nisi ex unitate? quae unitas nisi haec esset in aëre? quid autem aliud producit fruges et segetem inbecillam ac virentem erigit, arbores aut distendit in ramos aut in altum exigit, quam spiritus intentio et unitas?

But that there is unity in the air may be understood even by the inner coherence of our bodies. For what else could it be that keeps them together if not the spirit? What else is it that makes our soul move? How could it move if not by tension? What tension could be there if not by unity? What unity could be there if not in the air? And what else makes fruit grow; what raises weak and green seed; what drives trees to spread their branches and to rise high, if not tension and unity of the spirit?²⁵

The πνεῦμα, however, acts not only in every single body of the world, but also gives unity to the cosmos altogether.

²³ For the relationship between the “creative fire” and the element see Lapidge 1978: 167, Furley 1999: 440 f., Wildberger 2006: 75–78.

²⁴ The quality that every individual body receives from the spirit is called ἔξις (“tenor”); beyond this, plants are said to have φύσις, animals ψυχή (LS 47P). The same distinction is found in Sen. *nat.* 6.16.1.

²⁵ *Unitas* seems to be equivalent to ἔξις (Wildberger 2006: 210 f.). Inquiring into Seneca’s terminology with reference to air, Bravo Díaz (1991) has noticed that there is ambivalence in his use of terms like *aer* and *spiritus* insofar as this usage is, despite his knowledge of the concepts of Stoic philosophy, not always technically strict.

The whole world thus forms a single body, so that the individual bodies within form parts of a larger unit, a tenet that is the foundation of the Stoic doctrine of *συμπάθεια*. According to this, every change, every movement within the cosmos has effects on the rest of it (Wildberger 2006: 16–20). The world is a large organism, and for this cosmic body God, as the active and reasonable principle, performs a function analogous to the one the soul fulfils for man. The human soul in turn is considered to be part or offspring of divine reason, and Seneca attaches great importance to this kinship between man and God, as in *epist.* 92.30: *Quid est autem cur non existimes in eo divini aliquid existere qui dei pars est? Totum hoc quo continemur et unum est et deus; et socii sumus eius et membra.* (“Why would you not think that there is something divine in us who are part of God? This whole world around us is one and is God; we are both his companions and his parts.”)²⁶ The question as to how man’s position within the world is to be established is also vital for Seneca’s cosmological reasoning.

COSMOLOGY

Whereas the world on the whole, according to the Stoics, will last forever, the existing world order, which is sometimes called *διακόσμησις*, to distinguish it from the eternal *κόσμος*, is bound to dissolve into pure fire.²⁷ This *ἐκπύρωσις* (conflagration), which is repeated at certain intervals, is not conceived as the destruction of the world, but as a reconstitution of the best possible state of the world, since all individual bodies are thereby transformed into divine fire. When the *ἐκπύρωσις* comes to an end, air is condensed to moisture bearing the seed from which will spring the new world.²⁸ What Seneca has to say about cosmogony, about the world’s dissolution in fire, and about the cosmic cycle of conflagration and renewal shows that he is well aware of the Stoic doctrines. Nevertheless, the various statements referring to these issues, which are spread throughout his works, do not give a coherent picture of his ideas.

²⁶ Cf. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*) 1.5, 8 (= *de otio*) 5.5, 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 6.6–8, 12.11.6 f., *epist.* 41.1 f., 66.12, *nat.* 1 pr. 14.

²⁷ For the term *διακόσμησις*, see *SVF* 1.98 (= LS 46G) and 1.107. Seneca uses *mundus* both for *κόσμος* and for *διακόσμησις* (Wildberger 2006: 478, n. 93).

²⁸ Evidence for the Stoic tenets concerning conflagration and cosmic cycles can be found in LS 46 and 52.

To start with, cosmogony is mentioned as a subject of man's scientific curiosity in *De otio* (*dial.* 8.5.5), where there are allusions to the undifferentiated status of the universe after conflagration, to divine reason acting upon matter to create and order separate entities, and finally to the divine origin of man's soul. The moment when the old order has dissolved and the new one has not yet begun to develop is captured in a beautiful picture in *epist.* 9: Speaking of the pure reason of the *sapiens*, which does not depend upon external circumstances, Seneca imagines (*epist.* 9.16) god (Iuppiter) *cum resoluta mundo et dis in unum confusis paulisper cessante natura acquiescit sibi cogitationibus suis traditus* ("reposing after the world has dissolved and the gods have merged and enjoying himself, engrossed in his thoughts, as nature is at rest for a while"). A more technical account is given in the *Naturales quaestiones*: Fire transforms the world "in itself"; after everything is consumed, fire gives way to moisture, yielding hope for a new cosmos.²⁹ At the end of the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, the deceased Cremutius Cordus, speaking in a προσωποποιία, uses the idea of everything mortal being bound to perish and of the world's periodic dissolution in fire leading to regeneration to give comfort to his daughter (*dial.* 6.26.6f.). After reminding her of natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, and conflagrations, which befall various parts of the world, thus indicating universal transience, he tries to console her by pointing out that everything that exists, including the souls of the deceased, will at some point dissolve in fire; comfort can be found in the thought that this conflagration does not end everything, but results in transformation and the beginning of a new world.³⁰

There are other passages that do not seem to be reconciled so easily with the Stoic tenet that the ἐκπύρωσις entails renewal and regeneration. In the *Consolatio ad Polybium*, it is viewed as destruction and the return of chaos.³¹ A more elaborate picture of devastation is presented in the treatise on water

²⁹ *Nat.* 3.13.1: *Dicimus enim ignem esse qui occupet mundum et in se cuncta convertat: hunc evanidum languentemque considerare et nihil relinqui aliud in rerum natura igne restincto quam umorem; in hoc futuri mundi spem latere.*

³⁰ The phrase in *antiqua elementa vertemur* (*dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*].26.7): "we will be transformed into the old elements" is, strictly speaking, not a correct statement of Stoic doctrine, but the general sense cannot be misunderstood. The notion of everlasting recurrence is alluded to when Cremutius talks of God deciding *iterum ista moliri* (*ibid.*: "to set in motion this process anew").

³¹ *Dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*).1.2: *Mundo quidam minantur interitum et hoc universum quod omnia divina humanaeque complectitur, si fas putas credere, dies aliquis dissipabit et in confusionem veterem tenebrasque demerget.* ("Some threaten the world with doom, and if you are willing to believe, some day will destroy this universe that comprises everything divine and human and will make it plunge into the old chaos and darkness.")

in the *Naturales quaestiones* (3.27–30). Here, the disaster that will strike the world at a time determined by fate is a flood that will annihilate a mankind spoiled by vice. It will not lead to complete dissolution of the cosmos because the water, having destroyed mankind and earth, will ebb and make way for a new generation—that is again doomed to corruption. How this scenario is to be reconciled with Stoic ἐκπύρωσις and thus with Stoic orthodoxy is subject to debate.³² Suffice it to say that there are analogies (the periodic recurrence, the imposition by fate)³³ as well as fundamental discrepancies (the catastrophe as punishment for wrongdoing).³⁴

Wherever the existing world order is under consideration, it appears as a well-structured whole, rational and beneficial to man's best interests. Anthropocentrism is the key feature of this conception; the world is visualized as a city to live in, as the common home of God and man (*dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*].18.2),³⁵ or as a body, an organic unity, ruled by divine reason, of which man forms part.³⁶ Seneca speaks of the cosmos in its entirety in the context of carefully conceived images that depict man's position within the beautiful order of the world so as to give encouragement or comfort. In the *Consolatio ad Marciam* Nature herself is said to inform the mourning mother about the *condicio humana*. A fictitious speech, delivered by Nature at the moment of man's birth (*dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*].17.6–18.8), gives an overall picture of the world, only to leave it to man to decide whether he wants to enter life (*dial.* 6.18.2): *Intraturus es urbem dis hominibus communem, omnia complexam, certis legibus aeternisque devinctam, indefatigata caelestium officia volventem. Videbis illic innumerabiles stellas micare [...]*. ("You are about to enter the common city of gods and men, which comprises everything; it is subject to certain eternal laws and untiringly does its duties to the heavens. You will see there countless stars twinkling [...].") Having laid out the celestial phenomena, sun, moon, and the five planets, Nature proceeds to point out the miracles of the atmosphere and the earth. The variety and beauty of terrestrial marvels are contrasted with the dire consequences man must face

³² Cf. Gaulty 2004: 235–266, Kullmann 2005: 142 f., Wildberger 2006: 56–58.

³³ In *nat.* 3.29.2 there is an explicit comparison between flood and *conflagratio*.

³⁴ Despite the fact that there are some late testimonies that call the conflagration κάθαρσις (*SVF* 2.598), the Stoic ἐκπύρωσις does not seem to have performed a moral function (Gaulty 2004: 247–253).

³⁵ For Stoic cosmopolitism, see *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).4 f., 9 (= *tranq.*).4.4, *epist.* 28.4, 102.21.

³⁶ *Epist.* 95.52: *Omne hoc quod vides, quo divina atque humana conclusa sunt, unum est; membra sumus corporis magni* ("Everything you see, which comprises the divine and the human sphere, is one; we are part of a large body."). See 92.30. For the unity of the cosmos and divine reason as principal "prior commitment" of Stoic physics, see White 2003: 127 f.

if he uses his abilities badly: diseases, dangers, and death then await him. But even so, Nature says in conclusion, man will opt for life if he is confronted with choice. By doing so, he will rationally accept natural law.³⁷

The law of nature is here seen first and foremost as the law of mortality;³⁸ man is destined to live not only on earth but also within the cosmos as a whole; all three spheres of the world are subjects of his observation and contemplation, his amazement and awe. In the *Consolatio ad Helviam*, the motif of *contemplatio caeli*, which makes life worth living, is more fully presented (*dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*].8.2–6).³⁹ Wherever he lives, man is able to direct his gaze to the heavens and to reflect upon his soul's kinship to the divine sphere. The existing world is seen as the best possible world, the human soul as its most magnificent part inasmuch as it is *contemplator admiratorque mundi* ("the viewer and admirer of the world").⁴⁰ Man's position within the cosmos is the prerequisite of this contemplation. Earth rests unmoving in the middle of the world (*epist.* 93.9) and it is from this center that man is able to watch the celestial sphere and to comprehend its order.

The triple classification of the cosmos into a celestial, a meteorological, and a terrestrial sphere, which is hinted at in the passage cited from *Ad Marciam* (*dial.* 6.17 f.), is developed at the very beginning of the second book of the *Naturales quaestiones*, where cosmology is divided into astronomy,

³⁷ *Dial.* 6.18.8: *Respondebis velle te vivere. Quidni? immo, puto, ad id non accedes ex quo tibi aliquid decuti doles! Vive ergo ut convenit.* ("You will answer that you wish to live. Of course, you will. But I am certain you will not enter a life that entails loss and dolor. So live under the agreement.") Inwood has pointed out that the reasoning in this passage is strongly influenced by the Socratic example in Plato's *Crito* (2005: 240–248).

³⁸ Inwood 2005a: 240–248; for the notion of natural law in the *Naturales quaestiones*, see Kullmann 1995: 72–76 and Kullmann 2005.

³⁹ For this motif see Küppers 1996 and Pfeiffer 2001. The idea that insight into the divine nature is the final aim of human existence is expressed in the *praefatio* to the first book of the *Naturales quaestiones* (*nat.* 1 pr. 4): *Nisi ad haec admitterer, non fuerat operae pretium nasci.* ("If I were not to gain access to this, it would not have been worthwhile being born.") For this passage see Gauly 2004: 165 n. 126.

⁴⁰ *Dial.* 12.8.4; cf. 12.8.6: *Proinde, dum oculi mei ab illo spectaculo cuius insatiabiles sunt non abducantur, dum mihi solem lunamque intueri liceat, dum ceteris inhaerere sideribus, dum ortus eorum occasusque et intervalla et causas investigare vel ocios meandi vel tardius [...], dum cum his sim et caelestibus, qua homini fas est, inmiscer, dum animum ad cognatarum rerum conspectum tendentem in sublimi semper habeam, quantum refert mea quid calcem?* ("Therefore, as long as my eyes can view that spectacle for which they are insatiable, as long as I may look at the sun and the moon, behold the other stars, inquire into their rise, their setting and their distances, and find out why they move faster or more slowly [...], as long as I am engaged with these and mingle as far as divine law allows with the celestials, as long as I direct my soul to the aspect of kindred beings and to heavens above, what does it bother me where I am walking?")

meteorology, and geography.⁴¹ The first of these deals with the form and matter of the heavens and the movement of the stars (*nat.* 2.1.1.), the second enquires into whatever lies between the heavens and earth, including not only meteorological phenomena like wind and rain but also earthquakes. Finally, water, land, and flora are defined as issues of geography (*nat.* 2.1.2). Seneca makes two specifications in his classification of cosmology; first, the earth is a subject not only of geography but also of astronomy as far as its position within the cosmos is of interest (*nat.* 2.1.4 f.). Second, the topic of earthquakes is assigned to meteorology, since their cause, air, belongs to the atmosphere (*nat.* 2.1.3). Combining different spheres of the cosmos with different explanatory principles, Seneca's structuring resembles Aristotle's method at the beginning of the *Meteorologica*, in which he blurs the boundary between the meteorological and the terrestrial sphere.⁴²

The earth rests unmoving in the center of the cosmos (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].1.2; *epist.* 93.9); it is spherical in shape (*nat.* 4b.11.2–4), and is a huge mass (*dial.* 1.1.2), but is of modest proportions if compared to the dimensions of the world (*dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*].21.2).⁴³ By assigning earth a central position, Seneca follows an old Stoic tradition (e.g., Cleanthes, *SVF* 1.537.7 f. = LS 54I), but with one exception. In his treatise on comets, the idea of geocentrism seems to be challenged. Even if the phrasing does not exclude all possibility of doubt, the text suggests that the theory of geocentrism is a subject for discussion.⁴⁴ More often than not, however, Seneca adheres to the traditional view of his

⁴¹ *Nat.* 2.1.1: *Omnis de universo quaestio in caelestia sublimia terrena dividitur.* ("The entire study of the universe is divided into research about celestial, meteorological, and terrestrial phenomena.")

⁴² *Aristot. meteor.* 1.1; cf. Hine 1981: 124–127.

⁴³ Cf. *nat.* 1 pr. 8–11, 4b.11.4; in all three instances it is called "a point" (*punctum*) within the universe; for this metaphor, see Gaulty 2004: 181–186.

⁴⁴ *Nat.* 7.2.3: *Illo quoque pertinebit haec excussisse, ut sciamus utrum mundus terra stante circumeat an mundo stante terra vertatur. fuerunt enim qui dicerent nos esse quos rerum natura nescientes ferat, nec caeli motu fieri ortus et occasus, <sed> nos ipsos oriri et occidere. digna res contemplatione, ut sciamus in quo rerum statu simus, pigerrimam sortiti an velocissimam sedem, circa nos deus omnia an nos agat.* ("It is also of importance to settle this question if we want to know whether the world is rotating while the earth is standing still or the earth is spinning while the world is standing. For there were those who said that we are moved by nature without noting it, and that it is not the movement of the sky that makes the sun rise and set, but that we ourselves rise and set. This question merits consideration so that we know what is our position within the world, whether we have been assigned a settled or a fast-moving dwelling, whether God drives everything around us or drives us.") Despite the objections raised by Wildberger (2006: 490 f., n. 127), the text seems to speak not about the earth rotating on its own axis; neither the wording *oriri et occidere* nor the last sentence seems to accord with such an understanding. See Gaulty 2004: 188 f.

school, which has been rightly termed a Stoic “article de foi” (Aujac 1989: 1437). This view is connected with a belief in the anthropocentrism of the cosmos. Man is at the center of the world, bound to look up to heaven, where his soul comes from,⁴⁵ while providence supplies him with everything he needs.⁴⁶

Earth nourishes and animates the plants that grow on it and it is able to do so because it is itself animate (*nat.* 6.16.1): *Non esse terram sine spiritu palam est: non tantum illo dico quo se tenet ac partes sui iungit, qui inest etiam saxis mortuisque corporibus, sed illo dico vitali et vegeto et alente omnia.* (“It is obvious that the earth is not without air, and thereby I do not mean only the air that ensures coherence and interconnects its parts, which even rocks and dead bodies have, but that animating, lively and nourishing air.”)⁴⁷ The analogy between earth and a living organism is crucial for the explanation of various natural phenomena in the *Naturales quaestiones*, but Seneca seems well aware of the limits of analogy and of the problems that can result from metaphoric language.⁴⁸

Since Aristotle, the second sphere of the cosmos, which comprises what lies between earth and moon, had been called τὰ μετέωρα (the meteorological region), but there had been no Latin equivalent. Referring to the atmosphere, Seneca sometimes uses *aer*, which in its proper sense signifies the element air, but he applies *sublimia* as well, a term he has coined to match the Greek τὰ μετέωρα.⁴⁹ The air within the meteorological region is influenced by the respective adjacent spheres; it is dry, hot, and thin where it comes close to the celestial region; it is dense and misty where it receives the evaporations from the earth (*nat.* 2.10.2, cf. *nat.* 4b.10). The individual phenomena that are assigned to the meteorological region in the *Naturales quaestiones* (clouds and rain, wind, earthquakes, halos and similar phenomena, thunderstorms) seem to be random, although they are subject to reason and natural law (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].1.3): *Ne illa quidem quae videntur confusa et incerta, pluvias dico nubesque et elisorum fulminum iactus et incendia ruptis montium verticibus*

⁴⁵ In *De otio*, man's position at the center of the world is interpreted as proof of his destination for *contemplatio rerum* (*dial.* 8.5). For the divine origin of his soul, see *ibid.* 8.5.5.

⁴⁶ The final chapter of the treatise on winds (*nat.* 5) presents the winds as *providentiae opera* (5.18.1: “works of providence”), as a benefit man receives from God, since it is due to the winds that the climate is temperate and fruits can ripen (5.18.13).

⁴⁷ For the terms Seneca uses for life, see Wildberger 2006: 211.

⁴⁸ Althoff 1997, who among others cites *nat.* 5.4.2 as an example (p. 104): Speaking about the origin of winds Seneca ridicules the analogy between evaporations from the earth and flatulence.

⁴⁹ For Aristotle's definition of meteorology, see *meteor.* 1.1; for the Senecan terms, see Hine 1981: 123–127, Bravo Díaz 1995.

effusa, tremores labantis soli aliaque quae tumultuosa pars rerum circa terras movet, sine ratione, quamvis subita sint, accidunt, sed suas et illa causas habent [...]. ("Not even those phenomena that seem to be random and accidental, viz. rain, clouds, the flashes and strokes of lightning, fires sent by the eruption of volcanic peaks, the shakings of an earthquake and other perturbations resulting from the turbulent region around the earth, occur without reason despite their suddenness, but have their own causes [...].")⁵⁰ Thus, these phenomena command man's admiration no less than the miracles of the celestial region and the marvels of the earth (*dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*].18.3 f.).

The phenomena of the atmosphere are only once described as fortuitous. This is when, in the relevant treatise of the *Naturales quaestiones*, the comets are considered to be perennial celestial bodies and not the transient fiery phenomena of established tradition. They are seen in contrast to the random phenomena of the meteorological region, the argument in favor of their celestial status being their beauty.⁵¹ The atmosphere is seen as less fair, less pure, less bright than the heavens; but it connects the earth to the heavens (*epist.* 102.21): *Aer humanis divina secernens etiam coniungit.* ("The atmosphere not only separates man's dwellings from the divine realms, but joins them.")⁵² Not infrequently, it seems, Seneca views natural phenomena in a metaphorical way. This is particularly true for the highest sphere of the cosmos, the heavens, which are presented as realms of God, of pure reason, and of beautiful order (*nat.* 2.13.3 f.): *Nihil enim illic [scil. in aethere] iniuria cogitur, nihil rumpitur, nihil praeter solitum evenit; ordo rerum est, et expurgatus ignis in custodia mundi summa sortitus oras operis pulcherrimi circumit.* ("For nothing is there [viz. in the *aether*] compressed by force, nothing breaks, nothing uncommon happens. Everything is in good order there, and the purified fire, which has been allotted custody of the world's highest region, runs around the edges of the finest creation.")

The passage quoted from the treatise on thunderstorms argues against the assumption that fire from the *aether* could descend into clouds and cause lightning; the celestial sphere itself is dealt with neither in the *Naturales*

⁵⁰ Cf. *nat.* 1 pr. 14; for Seneca's view about natural law, see Kullmann 1995: 72–76 and Kullmann 2005.

⁵¹ *Nat.* 7.27.6: *Quorum formosior facies est quam ut fortuitam putes.* ("Their appearance is too beautiful to be considered fortuitous.") Cf. Gauly 2004: 157 f.

⁵² Cf. *nat.* 4b.10: *Editor aer, quo longius a terrarum colluvie recessit, hoc sincerior puriorque est.* ("The greater the distance between the air in the height and the mud of the earth, the clearer and purer it is.")

quaestiones nor elsewhere in a coherent manner.⁵³ Of the three topics of cosmology referred to in *nat.* 2.1.1., only the *caelestia* (“astronomy”) are not—with the exception of the comets—a subject of the work. As with his treatment of atmosphere, Seneca’s terminology is far from precise. Besides the term *caelum* (“sky, heavens”), Seneca uses *aether* as well as *ignis* (“fire”) to signify the highest sphere of the world.⁵⁴ There are, then, only incidental remarks concerning astronomy; when speaking of the rainbow, the sun is adduced as evidence for the shortcomings of man’s sensory perception, since it is far bigger than it appears to be and it moves far more quickly than it seems to (*nat.* 1.3.10). The comets, subject of the seventh book of the *Naturales quaestiones*, are the sole exception. While Anaxagoras and Democritus declared them to be an optical illusion and Aristotle regarded them as fiery phenomena of the atmosphere, Seneca favors the theory that they are perennial celestial bodies moving in regular, if unknown, orbits. I believe the reason why Seneca has discarded the established ancient ideas on comets and argues for a theory that comes close to the modern one is to be found in a metaphorical view of the phenomena. The comets are considered to be signs of the beautiful order of the heavens.⁵⁵

Where the celestial region is spoken of, it is presented as a divine realm, as a sphere to which man’s sensory perception has limited access, as the origin of the human soul, where it longs to return to (*epist.* 102.23f.). As long as man is tied to his earthly existence, he is bound to reach for the heavens by means of his intelligent soul and to admire and worship the

⁵³ Gross (1989: 318–320) has suggested that two books on the phenomena of the heavens have been lost; his hypothesis rests on Hine’s finding that in the Archetypus book IVb was numbered as the third book (1981: 4–6) and on a notice by Cassiodorus (*inst.* 2.6.4, frg. 13 Haase; cf. Lausberg 1989: 1928f.) mentioning a lost work of Seneca’s entitled *De forma mundi* (“On the form of the world”). For different conclusions on book numbering and book order in the *Naturales quaestiones*, see Gauly 2004: 53–67.

⁵⁴ Hine 1981: 123, Bravo Díaz 1995: 10–25.

⁵⁵ See in particular *nat.* 7.27.6: *Cometas non frequenter ostendit [scil. natura], attribuit illis alium locum, alia tempora, dissimiles ceteris motus: voluit et his magnitudinem operis sui colere. quorum formosior facies est quam ut fortuitam putes, sive amplitudinem eorum consideres sive fulgorem, qui maior est ardentiorque quam ceteris. facies vero habet insigne quiddam et singulare, non in angustum coniecta et artata, sed dimissa liberius et multarum stellarum amplexa regionem.* (“Nature does not often show us comets; she has assigned them a different space, different times, dissimilar movements; she wanted to celebrate her great work also in the comets. Their appearance is too beautiful to be considered fortuitous, if you look at their dimensions or their splendour, which is more sublime and brighter than any other. Not least their form has something special and unique, since it is not narrowly limited and confined, but spreads out widely and comprises the region of many stars.”) For Seneca’s theory of comets, see Gauly 2004: 143–164.

divine majesty (*dial.* 8 [= *de otio*].5.5–8; *nat.* 1 pr. 7–13). Having been relieved of its body and its impairments, the human soul will rise and look down upon the limitations of life on earth (*dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*].24 f.). Seneca's cosmology first and foremost deals with man, his origin, and his end. Complete insight into the order of the cosmos is his aim—an aim not yet reached (*nat.* 7.25.4): *Veniet tempus quo ista quae nunc latent in lucem dies extrahat et longioris aevi diligentia. ad inquisitionem tantorum aetas una non sufficit, ut tota caelo vacet.* (“There will come an age when time and long-standing and thorough research reveal whatever is now concealed. The span of one human life is not enough for the investigation of such a demanding subject, even if it has been completely devoted to the study of the heavens.”)

PHYSICS III: THEOLOGY*

Aldo Setaioli

1.

The first book of the *Natural Questions* opens with an enthusiastic praise of theology, conceived of as a personal search after the nature and ontological essence of godhead, beyond all representations transmitted by cultural and literary tradition or fostered by institutional and political conventions. In Varronian terms, one might say that here Seneca favors the *theologia naturalis* over both the *theologia fabulosa* and the *theologia civilis*;¹ or, according to the terminology used by Seneca himself in his lost *De superstitione*, in this page he is concerned with the *res*, the “thing itself,” rather than the *mos*, the convention or custom of the generally accepted religious practice.² Here theology is, to all effects, identified with physics:³ the cosmos is conceived of as God’s visible manifestation, and, as we shall see, knowledge of God is required in order to honor him correctly. For this reason, Seneca grants physics (i.e., theology) primacy over the two other branches of philosophy⁴—not merely over logic, but over ethics as well: obviously, a correct moral behavior and progress toward virtue (the main object of Seneca’s philosophical writing) cannot be achieved without gaining a correct knowledge of God and our relationship to him.⁵

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¹ For Seneca’s basic acceptance of this distinction, cf. Vottero 1998: 53 f.

² Sen. frg. 39 Haase = F 72 Vottero: *omnem istam [...] deorum turbam [...] sic [...] adorabimus ut meminerimus cultum eius magis ad morem quam ad rem pertinere*. Cf. Mazzoli 1984: 986.

³ Cf. SVF II 42, where theology is presented as the crowning of physics.

⁴ Sen. *nat.* 1 pr. 2. Although Seneca refers only to physics and ethics, *errores nostros discutit* and *ambigua vitae* (cf. *epist.* 90.29) suggest that he has logic too in mind, though it is subordinate to ethics.

⁵ The Stoics, in fact, defined philosophy as ἐπιστήμην θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων (SVF II 36; cf. 35, 1017), a definition accepted by Seneca (*divinorum et humanorum scientiam: epist.* 89.5; cf. 90.3). These two components can hardly be separated. Contemplation, that is meditation directed at higher realities, cannot be separated from action (*dial.* 8 [= *de otio*].5.8). Only he who knows God can properly honor him (*epist.* 95.47), but we can do so only by

Seneca's texts on God and our relationship to him are numerous and permit us to sketch a clear picture of his standpoint.⁶ To begin with, there are passages that testify to a strong religious sensitivity. The beauty of nature, in particular, gives him an indefinite religious shiver—*quaedam religionis suspicio*.⁷ The Greek Stoics, too, drew the idea of God from the beauty of the cosmos,⁸ but most of the times they favored rational inference: the perfection of the created universe testifies to the wisdom of a divine craftsman⁹—a sort of cosmological proof of God's existence, which, of course, repeatedly appears in Seneca, too.¹⁰ The latter, however, aims to communicate the inner experience of the divine.¹¹ Significantly, he experiences the same religious shiver both when he faces unspoiled and uncontaminated nature and when he pictures the ethical perfection of the soul of the good and wise man.¹² Aesthetic and religious experiences are inextricably intertwined, as are sensible and moral beauty, inasmuch as they are complementary aspects of the divine.¹³ Seneca, however, is fully aware of the fact that this instinctual stage is indeed very far from the knowledge of God's innermost essence, which, in his own words, "escapes the eyes and must be viewed by thought."¹⁴

On a less emotionally subjective level Seneca resorts to one of his school's standard arguments in order to prove the existence of God: the consensus of all nations in this belief.¹⁵ He obviously refers to the Stoic doctrine of the

imitating him (*epist.* 95.50, cf. 90.34); see below. Clearly, Seneca's interest for practical ethics cannot be totally suppressed in favor of a merely theoretical contemplation of God.

⁶ An essential collection of Seneca's pronouncements on the subject is provided by Motto 1955b. Cf. also Motto 1970, s.v. "God," "piety," "prayer," "superstition," and "worship."

⁷ Sen. *epist.* 41.3.

⁸ SVF II 1009.

⁹ Cf., e.g., SVF II 1010, 1106 f.

¹⁰ E.g., Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*) 1.2–4, *benef.* 7.31.4, *nat.* 1 *pr.* 14 f.

¹¹ Cf. Bellincioni 1986: 33 (the essay first appeared as Bellincioni 1980), Armisen-Marchetti 1990a: 89. This work contains an important treatment of *epist.* 41.2–5 (for which see also Grammatico 1987: 144 f.) and 115.3–6. In Seneca's attitude Armisen-Marchetti sees a heritage of Roman native religious sensitivity (cf. Andreoni Fontecedro 2000: 189) as well as the echo of contemporary taste for the "numinous" in nature; Seneca, however, is closer to Cic. *nat.* 2.98 than to first-century AD descriptions.

¹² Sen. *epist.* 41.2–5, 115.3–6. For the nod to Plat. *Phaedr.* 250d (cf. Cic. *off.* 1.15, *fin.* 2.52) cf. Armisen-Marchetti 1990a: 94, Setaioli 2008.

¹³ Cf. Setaioli 2007b: 52–57 for the texts quoted in the previous note and *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*) 18, *benef.* 4.5, *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 8.2–6.

¹⁴ Sen. *nat.* 7.30.3: *effugit oculos; cogitatione visendus est* (cf. below, n. 114).

¹⁵ Sen. *epist.* 117.6: *multum dare solemus praesumptioni omnium hominum et apud nos veritatis argumentum est aliquod omnibus videri; tamquam deos esse inter alia hoc colligimus,*

κοινὰ ἔννοιαι—conceptions considered to be common to all mankind and an infallible criterion of truth¹⁶—as made clear by the term *praesumptio*, coined by Seneca as an exact calque of πρόληψις, used by the Greek Stoics to express this idea.¹⁷

2.

As far as the ontological essence of God is concerned, Seneca accepts the Stoic concept of πνεῦμα (*spiritus*), the fiery breath pervading and animating every part of the universe.¹⁸ This breath is completely immanent in the material cosmos¹⁹ and although, as we shall presently see, it is conceptually distinct, as an active (τὸ ποιῶν) rational power (λόγος, *ratio*), from matter (οὐσία) and its sheer passivity (τὸ πάσχον), it is itself material, to the point that, broadly speaking, it can be identified not merely with nature,²⁰ but with the cosmos itself.²¹ Clearly, Seneca accepts, in principle, the monistic conception of Stoicism. His universe is unitary²² and his *spiritus* is not

quod omnibus insita de dis opinio est nec ulla gens usquam est adeo extra leges moresque proiecta ut non aliquos deos credat. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 27 f. This was, of course, a traditional argument, found, for instance, in Cicero, *nat.* 2.5, 2.15, and in S. Emp. *adv. math.* 9.61–71.

¹⁶ Cf. *SVF* II 473 (p. 154, 29 f.). For the application of this doctrine to the existence of God, cf., e.g., *SVF* II 337. See Verbecke 1993.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, the dictionary of Pittet 1937 did not proceed beyond the letter c; that of Borgo 1998 is limited to ethical vocabulary. Neither deals with the term *praesumptio*. Cicero, though repeatedly referring to the same doctrine, is content with vague and inaccurate circumlocutions. At *nat.* 1.43 f. (*anticipatio, praenotio*) he refers to Epicurean, not Stoic πρόληψις. For Cicero's renderings, cf. Lišcu 1930: 115–128, Hartung 1970: 78–101, Lévy 1992a: 302–304. For Seneca's contribution to philosophic terminology, see, e.g., Setaioli 2000: 97–109, Setaioli 2006–2007: 336.

¹⁸ Suffice it to refer to the lively exposition found at Sen. *nat.* 6.16.1.

¹⁹ At Sen. *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 8.3 the Stoic god is defined as *divinus spiritus per omnia maxima et minima aequali intentione diffusus*. Here Seneca also hints at the Stoic conception of τόνος (*intentio*), though it is not true that this is the same everywhere. In this passage the non-Stoic conception of an incorporeal god (*incorporalis ratio*) is also envisaged. Cf., e.g., Lagrange 1928: 332 f.

²⁰ Cf., e.g., Sen. *benef.* 4.7.1: *quid enim aliud est natura quam deus et divina ratio toti mundo partibusque eius inserta?*; 4.8.2, *nat.* 2.45.3, frg. 122 Haase = F 84 Vottero. See, e.g., Wildberger 2006: I, 35 f.

²¹ Cf., e.g., Sen. *epist.* 92.30: *totum hoc quo continemur et unum est et deus; et socii sumus eius et membra*. Cf. 95.52: *membra sumus corporis magni*; *nat.* 7.30.4: *regnum suum, id est se, regit*.

²² In agreement with Zeno and Chrysippus: *SVF* II 531: εἷς ἐστι [ὁ κόσμος]. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 17. For men as limbs of God, cf. *SVF* III 4: μέρη γὰρ εἰσιν αἱ ἡμέτεραι φύσεις τῆς τοῦ ὅλου.

an immaterial “spirit”—in the Stoic conception only a body can indeed act on other bodies.²³

Surely, there are a number of texts in which Seneca appears to assume a distinction between God and the world; the former can be seen both as the mind governing the universe and as the universe itself governed and ruled by that mind.²⁴ This is why Seneca says that God is all we can see²⁵ and, elsewhere, that he is both all we can see and all we cannot see.²⁶ Throughout Epistle 65 to Lucilius he opposes God, conceived of as an active and acting power, to a totally passive matter,²⁷ and often, elsewhere, he calls him *rector*, or *artifex*, or *conditor* of the universe.²⁸ But to Seneca God remains “the greater and better part of his own work,”²⁹ or, as he puts it with an expressive boldness that, though seemingly paradoxical, provides nevertheless a faithful formulation of the innermost meaning of the Stoic doctrine, “his own maker.”³⁰ The whole cosmos can be called “God” as the word “man” denotes the human microcosm made up of body and soul. But just as Seneca agrees with Plato in considering the soul as each man’s real self,³¹ so, in the universe, God, the *mens universi*,³² corresponds to the soul in man.³³ In his capacity of universal λόγος God can

²³ Criticism of the incorporeal god (*deum sine corpore*) of Platonism is implied in Sen. frg. 32 Haase = F 66 Vottero. Cf. Vottero 1998: 305. For God in Stoicism, cf., e.g., Long and Sedley 1987: I, 277–279. For Seneca, e.g., Gentile 1932: 19–27.

²⁴ Cf., e.g., Wildberger 2006: I, 22. Also Gersh 1986: I, 165 f.

²⁵ Sen. nat. 2.45.3: *ipse enim est hoc quod vides totum, partibus suis inditus*.

²⁶ Sen. nat. 1 pr. 13: *quid est deus? quod vides totum et quod non vides totum*. Cf. Lagrange 1928: 332.

²⁷ Clearly, Seneca has the Stoic distinction between τὸ ποιῶν and τὸ πάσχον in mind: *epist.* 65.23: *potentius autem ac pretiosius quod facit, quod est deus, quam materia patiens dei*.

²⁸ Cf., respectively, Sen. dial. 7 (= vit. beat.).8.4 and *epist.* 65.23, nat. 2.35.1 and *epist.* 65.19, 119.5.

²⁹ Sen. nat. 7.30.3: *maior [...] pars sui operis et melior*.

³⁰ Sen. frg. 15 Haase = F 87 Vottero: *nos aliunde pendemus [...] deus ipse se fecit*. Cf. Scarpata 1970²: 153, Lausberg 1970: 93 f., Mazzoli 1977: 29 f., Mazzoli 1984: 961, Wildberger 2006: I, 14 f. God “makes himself” as active principle (ποιῶν) acting upon passive matter (πάσχον), thus creating the world, which, broadly speaking, can itself be called “God.”

³¹ Cf. Sen. dial. 6 (= cons. Marc.).24.5, 25.1, and the Platonic texts quoted in Setaioli 2000: 295 and n. 116. For this idea in Platonism and in pagan and Christian Latin literature, see Setaioli 1995: 17 f., with the bibliography quoted and discussed.

³² Sen. nat. 1 pr. 13; cf. *benef.* 4.7.1. Seneca is obviously thinking of the λόγος of the Greek Stoics.

³³ Sen. *epist.* 65.24: *quem in hoc mundo locum deus obtinet, hunc in homine animus; quod est illic materia, id in nobis corpus est*; nat. 2.45.1: *animum et spiritum mundi*; cf. 1 pr. 15. Cf. Bodson 1967: 32 f., Rist 1969: 258 f., Mazzoli 1984: 958. The idea is at least as old as Cleanthes: cf. Wildberger 2006: II, 492 f. n. 132.

be said to be “pure soul”³⁴—a soul that, though unfolding toward the outside, constantly returns toward and into itself.³⁵

Though Seneca’s god is one of the two principles recognized by Stoic ontology—the other being matter³⁶—it should be emphasized that this god cannot be conceived of as an entity separated from his phenomenalization in nature and the cosmos.³⁷ God is surely λόγος, *ratio*, but, as Seneca says in an epistle,³⁸ he is a *ratio faciens*, a reason that prints its mark upon the cosmos. Seneca’s universe is not dualistic in any way, though, as we shall see, the influence of Platonism in his work goes beyond mere linguistic formulations.³⁹ We can at most speak of an “immanent dualism,”⁴⁰ or of a cosmos resembling one, boundless Aristotelian σύνολον, in which form and matter cannot be separated.⁴¹ Only at the end of each cosmic cycle, marked by a universal conflagration (ἐκπύρωσις), does God’s actualizing power rest for a moment, leaving matter in a state of chaos.⁴² Such a unitary cosmos entails no impassable gulf between God and man: it is indeed *urbs dis hominibusque communis*,⁴³ as Seneca puts it, echoing well-known formulations by the Greek Stoics.⁴⁴

³⁴ Sen. *nat.* 1 *pr.* 14: *in illo nulla pars extra animum est; totus est ratio*. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 20.

³⁵ Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*) 8.4: *rektorque universi deus in exteriora quidem tendit, sed tamen introsum undique in se redit*.

³⁶ Sen. *epist.* 65.23: *universa ex materia et ex deo constant*. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 3–5.

³⁷ Sen. *benef.* 4.8.2: *nec natura sine deo est nec deus sine natura*. Cf., e.g., Rozelaar 1976: 459, Ortega Muñoz 1983: 313, Wildberger 2006: I, 11, 16. Cf., e.g., *SVF* I 88.

³⁸ Sen. *epist.* 65.12. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 39.

³⁹ On this level Seneca’s predilection for the rhetorical mold of the antithesis can at times enhance the impression of dualism.

⁴⁰ This felicitous oxymoron has been coined by Mazzoli 1984: 958 (“dualismo ‘immanente’”). Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 18. For the unacceptable idea of Seneca smuggling Platonic conceptions under cover of Stoicism cf. Setaioli, *supra*, p. 200.

⁴¹ So Scarpat 1970²: 156 f. André 1983: 55 considers Seneca’s position to be “une sorte de mysticisme rationnel.” Cf. Attridge 1978: 68 f.

⁴² Sen. *epist.* 9.16: *resoluto mundo et dis in unum confusis paulisper cessante natura* [scil. *Iuppiter*] *acquiescit sibi cogitationibus suis traditus*. Cf. *SVF* II 1064, Epict. *diatr.* 3.13.7. For the idiosyncratic use of the reflexive pronoun (*acquiescit sibi*), anticipating turns found in the Romance languages and at the same time emphasizing through language and style the inextricable unity of the active and passive aspect of Seneca’s universe, with God’s acting upon matter amounting to acting upon himself, cf. Setaioli 2006–2007: 339–341. Cf. also *nat.* 7.30.4: *regnum suum, id est se, regit* and frg. 15 Haase = F 87 Vottero, quoted in notes 21 and 30, respectively.

⁴³ Sen. *dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*) 18.2.

⁴⁴ *SVF* II 528: πόλις ἐκ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων συνεστῶσα. Cf. II 527. We shall come back to this correlation and affinity between gods and men. For now we shall be content with pointing out

3.

One might think that a dualistic element did find its way into Seneca's basically monistic conception by way of his ideas on the hereafter. Though at times he considers death to mark the total annihilation of man, not rarely he does in fact present it as a passage to a new and better life.⁴⁵ His emotional longing for the immortality of the soul, however, never quite turns into a philosophical position advocating a status of the soul distinct from, and opposed to, the physical world.⁴⁶

It is actually in this connection that we find a passage proving, on the one hand, that Seneca was not insensitive to the ideas current in contemporary Platonism, but permitting us, on the other, to appreciate how he adapted them to Stoicism⁴⁷ by transforming them to fit the "immanent dualism" we have been hinting at. When Seneca compares the soul to the sun, whose beams, though reaching down to earth, remain nevertheless attached to their heavenly origin,⁴⁸ there can be no doubt that his *language* is influenced by Platonic conceptions. Exactly the same image appears, a few centuries after Seneca, in a Latin Neoplatonist: Macrobius.⁴⁹ The very different meaning

an important corollary of the idea: man is a sacred thing for every other man, and should be treated as such (Sen. *epist.* 95.33, cf. *dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].31.7). Cf. Bellincioni 1979: 274, Mazzoli 1984: 970.

⁴⁵ In other words, Seneca fluctuates between the two prospects proposed by Socrates in Plat. *apol.* 40c–41c (the so-called "Socratic alternative").

⁴⁶ A detailed study of this problem and the related bibliography may be found in Setaioli 1997a, collected and updated in Setaioli 2000: 275–323, 411. It is hardly necessary to retrace my argument here.

⁴⁷ Seneca does not 'Platonize' Stoicism; he rather 'Stoicizes' Platonism. Cf., e.g., Wildberger 2006: II, 457 n. 36. Neither Wildberger nor, to my knowledge, other scholars (cf., e.g., Rozelaar 1976: 466 f.), however, connect Sen. *epist.* 41.5 with the Platonizing texts (Porphyry, Macrobius) we shall presently mention. Andreoni Fontecedro 2000: 190, who also ignores Porphyry and Macrobius, considers Sen. *epist.* 41.5 to be an unaccomplished anticipation of the Platonists' concept of emanation, but in view of the parallels we shall point out, and in spite of Macrobius's linguistic echoes of Seneca, it seems to me much more probable that Seneca is adapting a Platonic idea rather than that Porphyry may have taken up Seneca's image in order to give it a Platonizing twist.

⁴⁸ Sen. *epist.* 41.5: [*animus*] *maiore sui parte illic est unde descendit. quemadmodum radii solis contingunt quidem terram sed ibi sunt unde mittuntur; sic animus magnus et sacer [...] conversatur quidem nobiscum, sed haeret origini suae; illinc pendet, illuc spectat et nititur, nostris tamquam melior interest.* Similar ideas, without the image of the sun, are found elsewhere in Seneca: e.g., *epist.* 65.18, *benef.* 3.20.1. For this passage and its parallels in later Platonism, cf. Setaioli 2000: 309 f., Setaioli 2006–2007: 342 f.

⁴⁹ Macr. *somn.* 1.21.34: *sicut solem in terris esse dicimus, cuius radius advenit et recedit, ita animorum origo caelestis est sed lege temporalis hospitalitatis hic exulat.* Macrobius's formulation is very probably influenced by Seneca (*in terris ~ terram; radius ~ radii*).

expressed by this image in Platonism is apparent in Macrobius's context, and is spelled out in a passage of Porphyry's, in which we find, appended to the same image, the specific remark that the soul is a transcendent entity that cannot mix with corporeal objects and is radically different in essence from all sources of material light, including the sun.⁵⁰ Seneca, by contrast, often states that the soul is akin to the cosmos or even its most magnificent part.⁵¹

I have hinted at contemporary Platonism, rather than at Plato, quite on purpose. In Seneca we find repeated allusions to the resistance of matter to God's action in the universe, which may appear to introduce a further element of at least seeming dualism. Though some scholars deny any Platonic influence in this connection,⁵² the fact cannot be denied that these allusions recur, among other texts, in Epistles 58 and 65, where Platonic, or rather Platonizing ideas are discussed; that they are accompanied by hints at undoubtedly Platonizing conceptions; and—last but not least—that they are closely matched by doctrines found in Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic texts that have come down to us. In my opinion, the presence of Platonizing suggestions cannot be denied in Seneca; what we should be concerned with is to ascertain whether they introduce an element that cannot be re-absorbed into Stoic monism.

In the preface to the first book of the *Natural Questions* Seneca asks himself whether God accomplishes whatever he wants or whether matter sometimes prevents this great craftsman from achieving perfection⁵³—and in several passages he answers his own question by accepting the second alternative. He has God himself say in the *De providentia* that it was not in his power

⁵⁰ Porph. F 261F, p. 288 f. Smith: ὥς γὰρ ὁ ἥλιος τῇ παρουσίᾳ τὸν ἀέρα εἰς φῶς μεταβάλλει ποιῶν αὐτὸν φωτοειδῆ, καὶ ἐνοῦται τῷ ἀέρι τὸ φῶς ἀσυγχύτως ἅμα καὶ αὐτῷ κεχυμένον, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐνουμένη τῷ σώματι μένει πάντως ἀσύγχυτος, κατὰ τοῦτο μόνον διαλλάττουσα, ὅτι ὁ μὲν ἥλιος σῶμα ὢν καὶ τόπῳ περιγραφόμενος οὐκ ἔστι πανταχοῦ, ἐνθα καὶ τὸ φῶς αὐτοῦ, ὥς οὐδὲ τὸ πῦρ· μένει γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸ ἐν τοῖς ξύλοις ἢ ἐν θυραλλίδι δεδεμένον ὡς ἐν τόπῳ. ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ, ἀσώματος οὖσα καὶ μὴ περιγραφομένη τόπῳ, ὅλη δι' ὅλου χωρεῖ καὶ τοῦ φωτὸς ἑαυτῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος, καὶ οὐκ ἔστι μέρος φωτιζόμενον ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἐν ᾧ μὴ ὅλη πάρεστιν. The image and the idea had probably been current for a long time in Platonism.

⁵¹ E.g., Sen. *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).8.4: *pars eius magnificentissima*. This is why it is naturally bent on contemplating the cosmos: *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).8.6: *animum ad cognatarum rerum conspectum tendentem*; *nat.* 1 pr. 12: *in originem redit [...] scit illa ad se pertinere*.

⁵² As done, e.g., by Wildberger 2006: I, 53–55, 276 f. The problem is merely hinted at in Grammatico 1987: 140.

⁵³ Sen. *nat.* 1 pr. 16: *deus quicquid vult efficiat an <in> multis tractanda destituant et a magno artifice prave multa formentur non quia cessat ars, sed quia id in quo exercetur saepe inobsequens arti est*. What is at stake is God's power: *quantum deus possit* (ibid.).

to exempt men from misfortunes,⁵⁴ the reason being that “the craftsman cannot change matter,” as Seneca has said a few lines before.⁵⁵ This concept is developed at greater length in Epistles 58 and 65—two letters in which in all probability Seneca drew upon a commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*, as I have argued elsewhere.⁵⁶ In the first one Seneca pictures God roaming in the midst of Plato’s ideas and seeing to the permanence of his creatures,⁵⁷ which he could not endow with inborn immortality because of matter’s resistance.⁵⁸ Though in all probability referring to the sensible world, Seneca’s mention of a permanence guaranteed by God’s assistance in overcoming the creatures’ own perishability is strongly reminiscent of the words addressed in Plato’s *Timaeus* by the demiurge to the lesser gods, who have been created by him, and because of this owe immortality not to their own nature but to his will and care.⁵⁹ In Seneca too the supreme god pervading the cosmos creates lesser deities to act as his ministers.⁶⁰ The idea of lesser gods is anything but foreign to Stoicism,⁶¹ and the concept of an immanent god is as orthodox as can be; but the supreme god *generating*⁶² lesser deities *at the beginning of creation* closely resembles the picture sketched by Plato in the

⁵⁴ Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).6.6: *non poteram vos istis subducere*. Cf. Epict. *diatr.* 1.1.12: οὐκ ἐδυνάμην. See *supra*, p. 298, n. 179.

⁵⁵ Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).5.9: *non potest artifex mutare materiam*. Cf., e.g., Riesco Terrero 1966: 62f. Here Seneca appears to have solved in accordance with the “immanent dualism” of the Stoa the problem he poses at *nat.* 1 *pr.* 16: *ipse* [scil. *deus*] *materiam sibi formet an data utatur*.

⁵⁶ Setaioli 1988: 126–140.

⁵⁷ If, as I believe, Seneca is still moving within the frame of Stoic cosmology, this permanence is perforce limited to the duration of the cosmic cycle. For *aeternus* used in this sense, cf. Setaioli 2000: 304 and n. 160.

⁵⁸ Sen. *epist.* 58.27: *miremur in sublimi volitantes rerum omnium formas deumque inter illas versantem et hoc providentem, quemadmodum quae immortalia facere non potuit, quia materia prohibebat, defendat a morte ac ratione vitium corporis vincat*. 28: *manent enim cuncta, non quia aeterna sunt, sed quia defenduntur cura regentis: immortalia tutore non egerent*. Wildberger 2006: I, 54f. is surely right in remarking that the way Seneca pictures Plato’s ideas has not a few unplatonic traits. It can hardly be denied, however, that the ideas are undoubtedly *propria Platonis suppellex*, to borrow Seneca’s own words (*epist.* 58.18); besides, as already remarked, Seneca is not following Plato, but the Platonism of his own time.

⁵⁹ Plat. *Tim.* 41b: ἐπεὶ περ γε γεγέννησθε, ἀθάνατοι μὲν οὐκ ἐστὲ οὐδ’ ἄλλοι τοὶ τὸ πάμπαν, οὔτε μὲν δὴ λυθήσεσθέ γε οὐδὲ τεύξεσθε θανάτου μοίρας, τῆς ἐμῆς βουλήσεως μείζονος ἔτι δεσμοῦ λαχόντες ἐκείνων οἷς ὅτ’ ἐγίγνεσθε συνεδείσθε.

⁶⁰ Sen. *frg.* 16 Haase = F 86a Vottero: *cum prima fundamenta molis pulcherrimae iaceret* [...], *quamvis ipse per totum se corpus intenderat, tamen ministros regni sui deos genuit*.

⁶¹ We have already found them at Sen. *epist.* 9.16 (*supra*, note 42), and will return to them below. Lesser deities as ministers to the supreme god appear, e.g., at *SVF* II 1178.

⁶² Γένεσις and γίγνεσθαι recur very frequently at Plat. *Tim.* 40d–f.

Timaeus.⁶³ In the *Timaeus* passage, however, it is the fact of being generated that, by itself, rules out immortality, whereas in Epistle 58 Seneca, as we have seen, ascribes this characteristic to the resistance of matter limiting God's power.

In Epistle 65 Seneca attributes to Plato an outline of philosophical causes that has no parallel in the master himself but is closely matched in later Platonic tradition from Alcinoüs down to Porphyry and to Proclus.⁶⁴ In this letter Seneca quotes a passage from the *Timaeus* in his own translation.⁶⁵ Plato's text does indeed present the idea of the limitation and imperfection of things created, which God wishes to make "as much like him as possible"; but we have already seen that for Plato imperfection is attached to anything created, whereas in Seneca God himself is prevented from deploying all his power in his work of creation. In Plato God wants creatures to be as much like him as *they* can; in Seneca he makes the world "as good as *he* can"—*quam optimum potuit*;⁶⁶ and we already know that for Seneca it is matter that poses bounds impassable even to God.⁶⁷

Several scholars consider this to be a Platonizing touch, while for others there is no breach in Seneca's basically Stoic position.⁶⁸ In my opinion, the parallels we have just pointed out make it hardly possible to deny that Seneca was influenced by the Platonists of his own time. His very shifting of the cause of imperfection in the world from the intrinsic essence of things created to

⁶³ Lausberg 1970: 95–102, Mazzoli 1984: 960, and Vottero 1998: 336 f. are probably right in interpreting this fragment from a purely Stoic point of view; what I mean to stress is that Seneca almost certainly had the *Timaeus*'s literary treatment and presentation in mind, and, very probably, the interpretation of later Platonists as well.

⁶⁴ Cf. Setaioli 1988: 126–137 for a detailed treatment.

⁶⁵ Sen. *epist.* 65.10: *ita certe Plato ait: 'quae deo faciendi mundum fuit causa? bonus est; bono nulla cuiquam boni invidia est; fecit itaque quam optimum potuit'* ~ Plat. *Tim.* 29: λέγωμεν δὲ δι' ἡντινα αἰτίαν γένεσιν καὶ τὸ πᾶν ὁ συνιστὰς συνέστησεν· ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος· τούτου δ' ἐκτὸς ὧν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ. Unfortunately, Seneca's translation is not treated by Reydam-Schils 1991, who also ignores Sen. frg. 16 Haase = F 86a Vottero.

⁶⁶ Wildberger (2006: I, 54, 265 f.) does not point out this shifting of emphasis in Seneca's text as compared to Plato's.

⁶⁷ Seneca differs from both Cicero, who completely avoids the problem posed by the imperfection of things created in the *Timaeus* (*omnia sui similia generavit*: Cic. *Tim.* 9), and Calcidius, who correctly connects it with the inborn limits of everything created (Calc. in *Tim.* p. 22.19 f. Waszink: *cuncta sui similia, prout cuiusque natura capax beatitudinis esse poterat, effici voluit*). For further ancient interpretations of this *Timaeus* passage, cf. Setaioli 1988: 135–137.

⁶⁸ See the overview provided by Wildberger 2006: II, 561 n. 325.

a limitation of God's power, however, indicates that he probably sought to integrate this idea into the Stoic framework of his thinking. According to Chrysippus, good cannot exist without evil, and the latter's existence is explained in various ways, including a limitation of God's powers.⁶⁹ After Seneca, the same idea reappears in Epictetus.⁷⁰ Seneca may have merely followed Chrysippus,⁷¹ but more probably he integrated the latter's doctrine by adapting ideas stemming from the Platonic tradition, with no intention of disrupting his basically Stoic conception. Actually, as we shall see, this very limitation of God's power may provide the opportunity for man to become God's collaborator by contributing to the completion and perfection of his work.

4.

A further trace of the influence of contemporary Platonism in Epistle 65 can be found in the concept that the patterns of creation, that is Platonic ideas, may be found not only outside God's intellect, but also within it.⁷² It could be said that in this Seneca anticipates St. Augustine;⁷³ but Seneca is not a Christian, though there is always a surfeit of readers and critics striving to label him as one,⁷⁴ or, if need be, ready to reproach him for not being

⁶⁹ Cf. *supra*, p. 298 nn. 174–178. God's power is described as limited at *SVF* II 1178, 1182, 1183; cf. 1180. Wildberger (2006: I, 55, II, 563 n. 332) makes only a brief allusion to *SVF* II 1178. She discusses texts on God and matter on p. I, 55 f.

⁷⁰ Epict. *diatr.* 1.1.12. Cf. *supra*, note 54. The Stoic cosmos is only the best of all *possible* worlds (see below). The limitation of the Stoic god's power is correctly recognized by Algra 2003: 172. For further bibliography, cf. Wildberger 2006: II, 875 f. n. 1334.

⁷¹ As assumed by Niem 2002: 86–88, in relation to Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).5.9: *non potest artifex mutare materiam*. A limit posed to God by the material structure of things created is indeed envisaged at *SVF* II 1170; cf. II 1048.

⁷² Sen. *epist.* 65.7: *nihil autem ad rem pertinet utrum foris habeat exemplar ad quod referat oculos an intus, quod ibi ipse concepit et posuit. haec exemplaria rerum omnium deus intra se habet numerosque universorum quae agenda sunt et modos mente complexus est; plenus his figuris est quas Plato 'ideas' appellat, immortales, immutabiles, infatigabiles*. For this representation of Platonic ideas, see Setaioli 1988: 129–133 (for the ideas contained in God's mind, cf. the parallels in Philo, Alcinous, Proclus, and others quoted on pp. 130 n. 543, 132 f. nn. 551–553).

⁷³ Cf. Ortega Muñoz 1983: 311.

⁷⁴ To quote just a few: Ortega 1965: 38 f., who thinks Seneca to be no pantheist and his god to be incorporeal (!); Riesco Terrero 1966: 75: "un Dios personal y transcendente" (!); and Gonzalo de la Torre 1967: 79, who believes Seneca to be influenced by Christianity and close to Catholicism (!). These and other authors make much of alleged parallels with the New Testament, such as Matt. 5:45 ~ Sen. *benef.* 4.26.1, or Paul. 1 *Cor.* 13:2 ~ Sen. *epist.* 102.28 (a

one.⁷⁵ His god is not, and cannot be, a personal god,⁷⁶ though he repeatedly calls him *parens*, “father.”⁷⁷ The whole dialogue *De providentia* develops the idea that God treats the good as a father treats his children by subjecting them to severe ordeals in order to test and enhance their virtue. But these are hardly more than metaphors,⁷⁸ possibly favored by the Romans’ special sensitivity as far as the father-son relationship was concerned. Surely, Seneca’s god never acquires an individual face or personality.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that Seneca is, in essence, a monotheist,⁷⁹ though, like most Stoics, he often speaks about “gods” in the plural.⁸⁰ These may well receive a cult of their own, but they depend nevertheless on the one, supreme God,⁸¹ and, as we know, will be re-absorbed into him at the moment of the universal conflagration.⁸² We have also seen that they were engendered by him at the moment of creation to act as his ministers.⁸³ Among these we may count the heavenly bodies, which Seneca at times calls by the name of gods.⁸⁴

Seneca is familiar with the Stoic doctrine of *πολυωνυμία*, which explained the multiplicity of the traditional gods by the one God’s multiple functions addressed by corresponding multiple names.⁸⁵ For God, Seneca says, “every name is fitting.”⁸⁶ He repeatedly lists God’s functions and their fitting names:

passage where the influence of Posidonius is, of course, much more probable: cf. Setaioli 2000: 305 f.). Rozelaar 1976: 468 compares Seneca’s *imitatio dei* (see below) to Lev. 19:2 and Thomas à Kempis.

⁷⁵ For example, Lagrange 1928: 346 (Seneca’s action and work “ont été presque stériles” because he was not a Christian), Ortega 1965: 42, 49 (Seneca is criticized because of his refusal of exterior cult and his lack of faith in the Christian God), Riesco Terrero 1966: 73 (“carecía de la luz de la revelación e ignoraba la ayuda de la gracia”), Grammatico 1987: 143 f. (Seneca is reproached for putting the wise man on a par with God or even above him—a criticism very much like the one leveled at philosophic pride by St. Augustine, *civ.* 19.4 [*fin.*]: see below, note 186, and cf. already Lagrange 1928: 342).

⁷⁶ Cf. Mazzoli 1984: 960.

⁷⁷ Cf., e.g., Sen. *epist.* 107.11, 110.10, *benef.* 2.29.4, 4.19.3, 7.31.4. Cf. Scarpat 1977: 31 f., Andreoni Fontecedro 2000: 187.

⁷⁸ Cf. Mazzoli 1984: 965.

⁷⁹ Cf., e.g., Riesco Terrero 1966: 57, André 1983: 63, Mazzoli 1984: 959 f.

⁸⁰ Cf., e.g., Grammatico 1987: 141 f., Wildberger 2006: I, 21; for *epist.* 73.16, where the singular and the plural artistically alternate, cf. Mazzoli 1984: 956, Setaioli 2006–2007: 347 f.

⁸¹ Cf. Sen. frg. 26 Haase = F 61 Vottero: *deorum omnium deus, a quo ista numina, quae singula adoramus et colimus, suspensa sunt.*

⁸² Sen. *epist.* 9.16 (*supra*, note 42). Cf. SVF I 536, II 1047, 1049.

⁸³ Sen. frg. 16 Haase = F 86a Vottero (*supra*, note 60).

⁸⁴ E.g., Sen. *benef.* 4.23.2. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 23, quoting several texts by Seneca and other Stoics.

⁸⁵ Cf., e.g., SVF II 1021, 1070, etc., and see Wildberger 2006: II, 505 f. n. 156.

⁸⁶ Sen. *nat.* 2.45.1: *nomen omne convenit.* Cf. Mazzoli 1984: 957.

fatum, providentia, natura, mundus, etc.;⁸⁷ and often he names him *Iuppiter*,⁸⁸ following the lead of the Greek Stoics, who often named him Ζεύς.⁸⁹ Sometimes, Seneca even explains the Roman religious appellatives of Jupiter (such as *Optimus Maximus*, *Tonans*, and *Stator*) through Stoicizing allegories,⁹⁰ or identifies him with other traditional deities on the basis of Jupiter's various characters and functions.⁹¹ As a rule, however, he does not accept the allegorical interpretation of mythical gods, nor of myth in general and the poets.⁹²

It is hardly necessary to add that Seneca despises as not merely untrue, but immoral and sacrilegious the gross polytheism found in both myth and poetry.⁹³ His god is radically different. To begin with, he is good. By his own nature, not only does he not want to harm: he cannot.⁹⁴ He benefits everybody, including the ungrateful and the evil.⁹⁵ Being a Stoic, Seneca of course believes in providence, though his *De providentia* is somewhat disappointing for the reader who expects a discussion of the origin of evil in the world, rather than

⁸⁷ E.g., Sen. *nat.* 2.45, *benef.* 4.7 f. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 37.

⁸⁸ E.g., Sen. *epist.* 9.16, 73.12, 73.14, *nat.* 2.45.1. Cf., e.g., Ramelli 1997. Grammatico (1987: 149 n. 3) remarks that Seneca uses *deus* more often than *Iuppiter* to refer to the supreme God.

⁸⁹ Sen. *epist.* 107.11 changes Ζεύς to *parens* in his translation of Cleanthes's verses (*SVF* I 527), but at 107.10 informs the reader that they are addressed to Jupiter.

⁹⁰ Sen. *benef.* 4.7.1. Cf. Gersh 1986: I, 175 f., Manning 1996: 313, Wildberger 2006: I, 24 f., 36.

⁹¹ Sen. *benef.* 4.8.1.

⁹² Cf. Sen. *benef.* 1.3.2–4.6, where he rejects the allegories of myth proposed by Chrysippus and Hecaton and still accepted by another member of his own clan, his contemporary Annaeus Cornutus; and *epist.* 88.5, where the allegorical interpretation of the poets (Homer) is also rejected. On Seneca's and Cornutus's attitude, see Setaioli 2003–2004: 341–367, with the literature quoted and discussed (to which add Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004). Wildberger (2006: I, 31–35; cf. II, 507 f. n. 159) reaches conclusions very similar to those of my essay. On the other hand, Seneca accepted the other branch of Stoic “λόγος-archaeology,” concerning the origin and nature of language, and aimed at recovering primeval authenticity—just like allegorical interpretation was, according to most Stoics. Cf. Setaioli 1988: 25–29, 37–43, Setaioli 2000: 228–230. Wildberger (2006: II, 520 n. 200) is quite wrong when she remarks that Seneca refers to the early, more “authentic” stage of language only as far as metaphors are concerned. See, e.g., Sen. *nat.* 2.56.2 (Setaioli 1988: 39 n. 123). Besides, the doctrine of semantic extension through metaphors, loosening language's correspondence to reality and resulting in ambiguity, was genuinely Stoic: cf. Setaioli 1988: 28 f. and n. 76.

⁹³ E.g., Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*) 26.6, *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*) 16.5, *epist.* 115.12–14. Cf. André 1983: 41, Mazzoli 1984: 981–983, Wildberger 2006: I, 33. Besides the all-too-human gods of myth and poetry, Seneca attacks those with beastly and monstrous appearance (frg. 31 Haase = F 65 Vottero). In general, he attacks the whole of Varro's *theologia fabulosa*.

⁹⁴ Sen. *epist.* 75.19, 95.49, *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).27. This is no diminution of God's freedom. Cf. *benef.* 6.23 and 6.21.3. See also *supra*, p. 287 n. 73, p. 288 n. 80 and p. 297 n. 164.

⁹⁵ Sen. *benef.* 1.1.9, 4.26.1, 4.28.1, 7.31.2–4.

an essay on evil's function as a test for the good man's virtue—which Seneca's book essentially is. Here too, however, he has followed the lead of the Greek Stoics.⁹⁶ What is imperative for man is to found his relationship to God on a reliable knowledge of his essence. We shall see that his divine soul, guided by philosophy,⁹⁷ is equal to the task.

5.

As already implied, according to Seneca the human soul is itself heavenly and divine in origin⁹⁸ and it occupies in the human microcosm the place of God in the macrocosm.⁹⁹ It is actually a particle of God hidden within the human body,¹⁰⁰ made of the same fiery breath (*πνεῦμα*, *spiritus*) as God,¹⁰¹ and therefore, like him, it is material,¹⁰² though made of the finest and thinnest matter there is.¹⁰³ By adapting to their own system the old idea that the human soul is a part of God,¹⁰⁴ the Stoics were able to recover another ancient idea, namely that man (or rather his soul) is himself (itself) a god.¹⁰⁵ In Stoicism we find it already in Zeno,¹⁰⁶ according to whom, as we shall see, one should not build temples, but guard God inside one's intellect, or rather consider the intellect itself as God, and it reappears in several Stoic masters.¹⁰⁷ Posidonius speaks of a god (*δαίμων*) within us, related to the God who rules the whole cosmos.¹⁰⁸ Seneca embraces this idea

⁹⁶ Cf., e.g., *SVF* II 1173, 1181.

⁹⁷ Cf. Sen. *epist.* 65.19 f., 89.5, 90.2 f., *nat.* 1 *pr.*, etc. Cf. also Inwood 2005a: 157–200, with my review: Setaioli 2007a: 692 f.

⁹⁸ This idea appears repeatedly after Seneca's exile (*dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*] 6.7 f., 8.4), and in a more developed form in his later works: *epist.* 41.5, 79.12, 86.1, *nat.* 1 *pr.* 12. See Reydam-Schils 2010. I could read this paper long before publication thanks to the courtesy of the author.

⁹⁹ Sen. *epist.* 65.24, *nat.* 1 *pr.* 15, 2.45.1. Cf. *supra*, note 33.

¹⁰⁰ Sen. *epist.* 66.12, 92.30, 120.14; cf. *nat.* 7.25.2 (with other conceptions of the soul), *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*) 5.5, *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 6.8, *epist.* 41.5, 71.6, 73.16. Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 20, 217–241.

¹⁰¹ E.g., Sen. *epist.* 50.6. Cf. *epist.* 66.12, *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 6.7: See, e.g., Rozelaar 1976: 464 f.

¹⁰² Sen. *epist.* 106.4: *nam et hoc* [scil. *animus*] *corpus est*.

¹⁰³ Sen. *epist.* 57.8: *ex tenuissimo constat*.

¹⁰⁴ Cf., e.g., *SVF* II 776. Cic. *Cato* 78 attributes the idea to Pythagoras; cf. *nat.* 1.27.

¹⁰⁵ This concept was also Pythagorean in origin, but it enjoyed enormous favor through the centuries, down to Christianity. See Haussleiter 1955. For Seneca cf. *epist.* 31.11, 41.1 f., 110.1. See, e.g., Scarpit 1977: 34, 38 f.

¹⁰⁶ *SVF* I 146 (below, note 127).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *SVF* III 4, 606, and see Wildberger 2006: I, 221–223.

¹⁰⁸ Poseid. F 187 Edelstein-Kidd = F 417 Theiler (cf. *SVF* III 460). See Theiler 1982: 276,

enthusiastically.¹⁰⁹ Most scholars consider his concept of a god within us as a mere corollary of the divine nature of the human soul.¹¹⁰ This is surely correct, but we must not underestimate the role played by the imagery related to the old idea of the personal δαίμων,¹¹¹ which had been at least in part adopted in, and adapted to, Stoicism.¹¹² In this connection Seneca salvages some beliefs of the old national religion by raising them to the standing of authentic, if unconscious, Stoicism, in that they assigned everybody a guardian deity: a personal *genius* to each man and a personal *iuno* to each woman.¹¹³ We have already seen that this plurality of lesser divine beings in no way affects Stoic monotheism.

A soul that is itself divine and endowed with the same λόγος (*ratio*) as God¹¹⁴ is well equipped to grasp divine reality, as Seneca had already remarked in the *Consolation* to his mother.¹¹⁵ Reason being what allows us to gain knowledge of God's supreme reason, this goal can in no way be attained

279, 303 f., 319, Kidd 1988: ii, 676 f., who points out the similarity of this δαίμων to the one in Plat. *Tim.* 90a, identical with the highest and noblest part of the soul. For the idea, cf. Setaioli 1995: 157–172 (Plat. *Tim.* 90a is quoted on p. 158 n. 915). Cf. also Andreoni Fontecedro 2000: 188, who quotes Eurip. frg. 1018 Nauck = Kannicht: ὁ νοῦς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ἐν ἐκάστῳ θεός. In later Stoicism the idea is recurrent in Marcus Aurelius (2.13.1, 2.17.4, 3.6.2, 3.12.1, 5.10.6, 5.27.1, 8.45.1, 12.3.4). Cf. Wildberger 2006: II, 785 n. 1083.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. the passages listed in notes 100, 101, and 105; especially Sen. *epist.* 41.1 f.: *prope a te est deus, tecum est, intus est* [...] *sacer intra nos spiritus sedet*; 73.16: *deus ad homines venit, immo* [...] *in homines venit*; 31.11: *deum in corpore humano hospitantem*.

¹¹⁰ E.g., Lagrange 1928: 334, 342, Armisen-Marchetti 1990a: 91, Manning 1996: 319. Lausberg 1970: 68 sees in Seneca's inner god an evolution toward the concept of *conscientia*. Bellincioni 1986: 26 emphasizes the closeness to the imagery of Socrates's δαίμων. Andreoni Fontecedro 2000: 188 is surely wrong in attributing the conception of the inner god to Seneca's "mysticism."

¹¹¹ Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 24, 230.

¹¹² Cf., e.g., *SVF* III 4, Epict. *diatr.* 1.14.12–14.

¹¹³ Sen. *epist.* 110.1: *maiores nostros* [...] *Stoicos fuisse; singulis enim et genium et iunonem dederunt*. Seneca (ibid.) calls these "second-class gods" (*inferioris notae*, also quoting Ov. *met.* 1.595: *de plebe deos*). Elsewhere (*epist.* 90.28) he distinguishes θεοὶ (*di*), δαίμονες (*lares et genii*), and ἥρωες (*in secundam numinum formam animae perpetitae*). Cf. Setaioli 2000: 310 f. n. 199, Setaioli 2006–2007: 358, Wildberger 2006: I, 24. Seneca adapts ideas from the old Roman religion to beliefs accepted by the Greek Stoics: *SVF* II 1101 f. (δαίμονες / ἥρωες). That in *epist.* 90.28 there are three classes of divine beings and not two (gods and δαίμονες, as assumed by Mazzoli 1984: 960) is also confirmed by the triple anaphora (*quid di* [...] *quid lares et genii* [...] *quid* [...] *animae*).

¹¹⁴ Sen. *epist.* 92.27: *ratio* [...] *dis hominibusque communis est*. God does in fact escape the senses: it can only be perceived through thought (*cogitatione visendus est*: *nat.* 7.30.3; cf. *nat.* 1 *pr.* 1).

¹¹⁵ Sen. *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 8.6: *animum ad cognatarum rerum conspectum tendentem*. Cf. Wildberger 2006: II, 801 f. n. 1133.

through a leap into the irrational, but only in the fashion of a geometrician or land surveyor, that is by measuring God's greatness in relation to all other realities.¹¹⁶

Seneca is well aware that our ability to achieve knowledge is limited, though we should never lose hope¹¹⁷—much more so in the case of God.¹¹⁸ But in the very same pages he emphasizes the idea that knowledge is continually progressing. Many secrets of the cosmos (and, as we know, God does not intrinsically differ from the cosmos)¹¹⁹ will be discovered in the future.¹²⁰ Knowledge of God is indeed necessary, and attainable through the affinity of our reason with his.¹²¹ In fact, only he who knows God can properly worship him.¹²² Ignorance of God's real essence and false opinions about him result in superstition, which fears what it should love¹²³ and defiles those it means to worship.¹²⁴

In the *Natural Questions* Seneca fervently preaches against superstition and the ignorance from which it stems, in a tone close to what we may term

¹¹⁶ At frg. 24 Haase = F 89 Vottero: *maiusque quam cogitari potest* Seneca appears to doubt the human mind's ability to grasp God. Cf. Wildberger 2006: II, 456 n. 34. This statement, however, must be understood in the light of the preface to the first book of the *Natural Questions*. Here, God marks the limit of the mind's ability to conceive (*qua nihil maius cogitari potest: nat. 1 pr. 13*); but man will finally succeed in "measuring God" (*mensus deum: nat. 1 pr. 17*). For the one-sided interpretation of this latter passage by Inwood 2005a: 192 ("man is not the measure of all things; god is"), cf. Setaioli 2007a: 692 and n. 7.

¹¹⁷ E.g., Sen. *nat. 7.29.3: di sciunt, quibus est scientia veri. nobis rimari illa et coniectura ire in occulta tantum licet, nec cum fiducia inveniendi nec sine spe*. Seneca often emphasizes the difficulty or even impossibility of achieving knowledge: e.g., *epist. 65.10, benef. 4.33.2, 7.1.5*.

¹¹⁸ Sen. *nat. 7.30.4: quid sit hoc, sine quo nihil est, scire non possumus*. But we have already seen that in this very same context God is declared to be perceptible by thought (*nat. 7.30.3: supra*, notes 14 and 114).

¹¹⁹ For the basic lack of ontological difference between the essence of the divine being and that of the sensible cosmos, and the identity of scientific research with theology, see Setaioli 2000: 306–315, Setaioli 2006–2007: 353–355.

¹²⁰ Sen. *nat. 7.25.6: veniet tempus, quo posterī nostri tam aperta nos nescisse mirentur*. Cf. 7.30.5–6.

¹²¹ Cf. Ozanam 1990: 279.

¹²² Sen. *epist. 95.47: deum colit qui novit*. Cf. Mazzoli 1984: 954, 956.

¹²³ As we already know, goodness is indeed the hallmark of Seneca's god: *supra*, notes 94 f.

¹²⁴ Sen. *epist. 123.16: amandos timet, quos colit violat; clem. 2.5.1: religio deos colit, superstitio violat* (as remarked by Manning 1996: 313, the distinction between *religio* and *superstitio* already appears in Cicero: *nat. deor. 2.71f.*). The foolishness of fearing God is emphasized at *benef. 4.19.1: deos nemo sanus timet; furor est enim metuere salutaria*. Cf., e.g., Turcan 1967: 59 f. For ignorance as the source of superstition cf. Ozanam 1990: 280 f. Vottero (1998: 50 f.) emphasizes two further roots of superstition according to Seneca: fear of the hereafter (*Thyest. 677–679*) and excessive fears and desires (*epist. 121.4, cf. 22.15*). Cf. also Sen. frg. 34 Haase = F 68 Vottero and see Vottero 1998: 307.

Lucretius's Epicurean "Enlightenment."¹²⁵ The resulting picture, however, is very different from Epicureanism: Seneca strives to prove that the cosmos is ruled by God and by a caring providence; only on the refutation of fear does he agree with Lucretius.

6.

Contemplation of nature—in Stoic terms the way to attain knowledge of God—is the only real and appropriate cult.¹²⁶ Following in the wake of Zeno,¹²⁷ Seneca believes that only the whole universe, or man's breast, can be the proper temple of God.¹²⁸ In fact, the only cult Seneca recognizes is man's inner attitude to God. First of all, one must have faith;¹²⁹ then, purity of mind,¹³⁰ or, as he puts it elsewhere, "pious and upright will."¹³¹ The wise man shall open his conscience to God¹³² and, most of all, will do his best to follow his example,¹³³ that is to try to be as good as he is: imitation of God is the necessary and sufficient way to render him a cult properly.¹³⁴ Philosophy, which teaches us how to live and is itself a gift of the gods, will help us achieve this goal.¹³⁵ It will teach us to worship virtue as much as the

¹²⁵ Cf. Lana 1955: 1–19.

¹²⁶ Cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 270.

¹²⁷ SVF I 146 (cf. *supra*, note 106): μή δειν θεοῖς οἰκοδομεῖν ἱερά, ἀλλ' ἔχειν τὸ θεῖον ἐν μόνῳ τῷ νῷ, μᾶλλον δὲ θεὸν ἡγείσθαι τὸν νοῦν. Cf. SVF I 264–267.

¹²⁸ Sen. frg. 123 Haase = F 88 Vottero: *non templa illi congestis in altitudinem saxis extruenda sunt: in suo cuique consecrandus est pectore; benef. 7.7.3: totum mundum deorum esse immortalium templum, solum quidem amplitudine illorum ac magnificentia dignum. Cf. nat. 7.30.1. Cf. supra* (note 7: *epist.* 41.3) for the religious shiver the spectacle of nature gives Seneca. Sometimes he even looks at the cosmos as at a new, overpowering sight (*epist.* 64.6).

¹²⁹ Sen. *epist.* 90.50: *primus est deorum cultus deos credere.*

¹³⁰ Sen. frg. 123 Haase = F 88 Vottero: *mente pura, bono honestoque proposito.*

¹³¹ Sen. *epist.* 115.5: *pia et recta voluntate; benef. 1.6.3: recta ac pia voluntate. Cf. Riesco Terrero 1966: 58, André 1983: 64f.*

¹³² Sen. *benef.* 7.1.7: *conscientiam suam dis aperuit.* It is in any case impossible to hide anything from God: frg. 24 Haase = F 89 Vottero: *patemus deo* (cf., e.g., Mazzoli 1977: 24f.), *epist.* 83.1: *nihil deo clusum est.*

¹³³ Sen. *benef.* 4.25.1: *deorum exemplum sequi.*

¹³⁴ Sen. *epist.* 95.50: *vis deos propitiare? bonus esto. Satis illos coluit quisquis imitatus est; cf. benef. 3.15.4, 7.31.5, dial. 4 (= de ira 2).16.2. See Lagrange 1928: 341, Mazzoli 1984: 978f., Vottero 1998: 49, Wildberger 2006: I, 271f. Cf. also [Sen.] de moribus 28: optimus ergo animus et pulcherrimus dei cultor est.*

¹³⁵ Sen. *epist.* 90.1–3. Philosophy cannot in fact be separated from *religio* and *pietas* (*epist.* 90.3).

gods,¹³⁶ and virtue in turn will teach us to obey Pythagoras's old precept, "follow God,"¹³⁷ and to become a living image of God, as far as right and proper.¹³⁸

This is the proper cult to be rendered to god; therefore not merely temples are useless, as we have already seen,¹³⁹ but also images of gods,¹⁴⁰ priests,¹⁴¹ offers, and sacrifices.¹⁴² It follows that religious ceremonies are worthless—not merely those of foreign religions, such as those of the Egyptians, the Jews, and others,¹⁴³ but also those of the national religion—when they are reduced to mere procedures devoid of any ideal content.¹⁴⁴

To be sure, Seneca's attitude toward national religion, Varro's *theologia civilis*, is nuanced and quite complex. St. Augustine has preserved several fragments of his lost *De superstitione*, in which Seneca attacked not merely foreign cults, but also several aspects of Roman traditional religion—but the saint blames him for not behaving consistently with his principles in public life.¹⁴⁵ In this lost work Seneca established the distinction between the *res* and the *mos*, truth and custom, which we have referred to at the beginning.¹⁴⁶ Scholars have discussed the dating of the *De superstitione*, which, in my opinion, must be placed rather late in Seneca's production.¹⁴⁷ Be that as it

¹³⁶ Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).26.7.

¹³⁷ Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).15.5: *deum sequere*, which translates εἰπὺν θεῷ.

¹³⁸ Sen. *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).16.1: *ut qua fas est deum effingas*. For the "imitation" of God see below, § 8.

¹³⁹ Cf. *supra*, note 128.

¹⁴⁰ Sen. *epist.* 31.11 (God's essence is far more precious than any precious material), frg. 120 Haase = F 94 Vottero.

¹⁴¹ Sen. *epist.* 95.47: *non quaerit ministros deos. quidni? ipse humano generi ministrat.*

¹⁴² Sen. *epist.* 115.5: *colitur non taurorum opimis corporibus contrucidatis nec auro argentoque suspenso nec in thesauros stipe infusa, sed pia et recta voluntate*; cf. *benef.* 1.6.3, frg. 123 Haase = F 88 Vottero.

¹⁴³ Cf., e.g., Sen. *epist.* 95.47, *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).26.8, frg. 34, 42 f. Haase = F 68, 73 f. Vottero. For Seneca's critique of foreign religions, see Turcan 1967, Mazzoli 1984: 989–992; for his attitude to the Jews in particular, Scarpata 1977: 57–107, Boccioni Palagi 1981, Vottero 1998: 51.

¹⁴⁴ E.g., Sen. *epist.* 95.47, frg. 36 f. Haase = F 69 f. Vottero. Cf. Attridge 1978: 67–69. Seneca, however, recognized a high value in the attitude of purity and innocence characterizing the simplicity of the religious practice of old: *epist.* 32.11, 95.72, *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Heb.*).10.7.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Aug. *civ.* 6.10 (*fin.*) (= Sen. frg. 40 Haase, not included in Vottero's collection); see Vottero 1998: 53 n. 256, with the literature quoted. Cf. frg. 31 Haase = F 65 Vottero.

¹⁴⁶ Sen. frg. 39 Haase = F 72 Vottero (*supra*, note 2); cf. frg. 38 Haase = F 71 Vottero: *quae omnia sapiens servabit tamquam legibus iussa, non tamquam diis grata.*

¹⁴⁷ A survey in Manning 1996: 314 n. 14, Vottero 1998: 55–57. With some exceptions (notably by Turcan 1967: 11–14, 37 f.), the most authoritative scholars agree on a late dating of the work.

may, that distinction enables Seneca to save the social conventions and the political expediency of religion.¹⁴⁸

7.

If in matters of cult Seneca's philosophic position enabled him to take a clear stand, only accepting the inevitable compromises imposed by politics, the situation is more complex when it comes to a specific aspect of religion connected with cult, namely prayer.¹⁴⁹ Strictly speaking, prayer as a purely external practice has no role in the Stoics' attitude toward God and the cosmos.¹⁵⁰ Unphilosophical prayer can even be not merely useless, but ridiculous or even shameful. Many people secretly address to God shameful prayers, which would make them blush, if others could hear them;¹⁵¹ and sometimes we pray to obtain useless things, and are lucky if the gods do not grant our prayers.¹⁵²

In the Stoic conception fate has been established from eternity by God and cannot be changed; the good man can only conform to God's universal reason.¹⁵³ Besides, by attaining virtue, man can obtain his highest good by himself.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Seneca clearly harbors the sentimental need to

¹⁴⁸ Seneca was obviously familiar with the use of religion as an instrument of power: *nat.* 2.42.3: *ad coercendos imperitorum animos sapientissimi viri iudicaverunt inevitabilem metum, ut aliquid supra nos timeremus*. Cf., e.g., Mazzoli 1984: 968. The whole context is probably influenced by Cicero's *De divinatione* (*Sen. nat.* 2.42.2: *in his [...] errat antiquitas ~ Cic. div.* 2.70: *errabat enim multis in rebus antiquitas*). See Setaioli 2005b: 248 and n. 60. As for the imperial cult, Seneca, though basically skeptical (cf. Manning 1996: 315, Ramelli 2000: 139 f.), strikes a compromise between religion and politics: see Mazzoli 1984: 987 f. Cf. *Sen. dial.* 6 (= *cons. Marc.*).15.1, *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*).17.1. For the *De clementia* (somewhat offsetting the *Apocolocyntosis*'s sarcasm), see Fears 1975.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Scarpat 1977: 41–56.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. already Lagrange 1928: 341 f.

¹⁵¹ *Sen. epist.* 10.5, *benef.* 6.38.4f.; cf. *epist.* 41.1. Cf. Bellincioni 1986: 17. This was commonplace in diatribe; but Seneca gives the motif a twist that revalues secret prayer: *benef.* 2.1.4: *vota homines parcius facerent, si palam facienda essent; adeo etiam deos, quibus honestissime supplicamus, tacite malumus et intra nosmet ipsos precari*.

¹⁵² *Sen. epist.* 95.2.

¹⁵³ For a detailed treatment of the problem (in particular concerning prayer at *nat.* 2.35–38, God as fate, and the relationship between the two) see Setaioli, *supra*, pp. 277–299. Prayer can at most “remind” the gods, though they hardly need it: *Sen. benef.* 5.25.4: *deos, quorum notitiam nulla res effugit, rogamus, et illos vota non exorant, sed admonent*. Cf. Turcan 1967: 61.

¹⁵⁴ *Sen. epist.* 31.5: *quid votis opus est? fac te ipse felicem; 8: hoc est summum bonum; quod si occupas, incipis deorum socius esse, non supplex*. Cf. *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).5.1: *unusquisque facere se beatum potest*.

imagine a god who listens to men's prayers.¹⁵⁵ But our prayers must not ask for any material goods;¹⁵⁶ they should be unselfish and disinterested.¹⁵⁷

What, then, should we ask of God? To begin with, nothing liable to damage someone else;¹⁵⁸ surely, the attainment of self-sufficiency, the wise man's αὐτάρκεια; but, basically, we should ask to be in agreement with nature, both the cosmic and the individual one. For us humans this is equivalent to the attainment of *bona mens*, or *recta ratio* (ὁρθὸς λόγος), the healthy state of the intellect and the soul;¹⁵⁹ we may add the first of the προηγμένα, the Stoic "preferables": the health of the body,¹⁶⁰ which is also in agreement with nature. The Stoic, then, prays for the fulfillment of God's plan; on this point he basically agrees with the Lord's prayer: "Thy will be done."

8.

We have seen that man's soul is a particle of God enclosed in a mortal body, that man must strive to imitate God, and that, by attaining virtue, he is able to give himself his own happiness. Still, Seneca's wise man is subordinate to the gods, not merely because he, as a mortal, is subject to pain, disease, and so forth. As we shall presently see, his real inferiority is not spelled out by this. The only proper criterion of evaluation is to what degree beings are endowed with reason. Man is surely ahead of the animals, but it is equally sure that he falls short of the gods, whom, however, he must imitate.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ As he resorts to the Stoic doctrine of the κοινὰ ἔννοιαι to prove the existence of God (*epist.* 117.6: *supra*, note 15), he appeals to the same doctrine to prove the efficacy of prayer, polemicizing with Epicurus's indifferent gods: *benef.* 4.4.2.

¹⁵⁶ As those of most people do: *Sen. epist.* 60.1.

¹⁵⁷ *Sen. ibid.*: *exaudiant di quandoque pro nobis vocem gratuitam.*

¹⁵⁸ *Sen. nat.* 3 *pr.* 14, *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).30.2. Cf. Gentile 1932: 90 f. and n. 10.

¹⁵⁹ *Sen. nat.* 3 *pr.* 14.

¹⁶⁰ *Sen. epist.* 10.4: *roga bonam mentem, bonam valetudinem animi, deinde tunc corporis*; cf. *epist.* 117.24. We may compare Juvenal's famous motto (*Juven.* 10.356): *orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*. Cf. already *Hor. carm.* 1.31.17–20: *frui paratis et valido mihi, / Latoe, dones at, precor, integra / cum mente, nec turpem senectam / degere nec cithara carentem.*

¹⁶¹ *Sen. epist.* 76.9: *in homine quid est optimum? ratio: hac antecedit animalia, deos sequitur.* God is in fact "all reason" (*totus ratio: nat.* 1 *pr.* 14; *supra*, note 34), whereas in man reason is found only in the soul. Nevertheless, our reason is not intrinsically different from God's (*ratio autem nihil aliud est quam in corpus humanum pars divini spiritus mersa: epist.* 66.12), and it unfolds by following nature, i.e., the divine λόγος, this being man's highest good (*quid est ratio? naturae imitatio. quod est summum hominis bonum? ex naturae voluntate se gerere: epist.* 66.39). Cf. *dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).5.1, *dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).8.2, *epist.* 66.41, *benef.* 4.25.1: *propositum*

This ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, to use Plato's terminology,¹⁶² is in fact the τέλος, the final goal of human life,¹⁶³ and philosophy promises us nothing less.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand the divine and heavenly origin of our soul is the guarantee that we are well equipped to attain this goal.¹⁶⁵ Seneca is formal on this point: nature has endowed us with such gifts as to enable us to rise to the level of God, if we do not neglect them.¹⁶⁶ The precious gift that must not be neglected is of course reason, which is perfect in gods and perfectible in men, but common to both.¹⁶⁷

If man is able to perfect his reason, he will not escape the physical weakness of the human condition, but his soul will be on a par with the gods¹⁶⁸ and will be legitimately compared to Jupiter.¹⁶⁹ His mortality will not make him inferior to the gods, since the perfection of virtue is not affected by duration.¹⁷⁰ As a consequence, the only difference between the wise and good man and God is duration¹⁷¹ and Jupiter is no better than the wise man,

est nobis secundum naturam vivere et deorum exemplum sequi. Cf. *supra*, notes 137 f. This is Seneca's version of the Stoic ideal of ὁμολογούμενως (τῇ φύσει) ζῆν; cf. Bellincioni 1986: 28.

¹⁶² Plat. *Tht.* 176b; cf. *rep.* 613b, *leg.* 716c. Cf. Rozelaar 1976: 468 f., Mazzoli 1984: 971. Russell's (2004) interesting essay on virtue as likeness to God in Plato and Seneca points out parallels between Seneca and Plato (but also Alcinous) and establishes a similarity between Seneca and Plato's *Philebus* in that both apply the idea to practical behavior; however, it tends to view Seneca as a dualist, by lending him a transcendent conception of rationality, though it unfolds in the physical world (e.g., p. 253). It should rather be emphasized that the difference between Seneca and Plato remains great and can be appreciated in all clearness if we pay attention to the limits set by Plato to human imitation of God (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν: *Tht.* 176b; εἰς ὅσον δυνατόν ἀνθρώπων: *rep.* 613ab; εἰς δύναμιν ὅτι μάλιστα: *leg.* 716c), whereas no such limits are envisaged by Seneca (at *dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*].16.1 (*supra*, note 138); the limit is subjective rather than objective), in keeping with his Stoic and monistic outlook. Actually, in some ways his wise man is superior to God (see below).

¹⁶³ Sen. *epist.* 92.3: *talis animus esse sapientis viri debet qualis deum deceat.*

¹⁶⁴ Sen. *epist.* 48.11: *hoc enim est quod mihi philosophia promittit, ut parem deo faciat.* Cf. frg. 27 Haase = F 62 Vottero: *virtus quae nos immortalitate donare possit et pares diis facere.*

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *supra*, notes 98–101.

¹⁶⁶ Sen. *epist.* 31.9: *dedit illa quae si non deserueris, par deo surges.*

¹⁶⁷ Sen. *epist.* 92.27: *ratio vero dis hominibusque communis est: haec in illis consummata est, in nobis consummabilis; 49.11: rationem [...] imperfectam, sed quae perfici possit.* It is our duty to develop the divine seeds sown within us: *epist.* 73.16 (cf. Wildberger 2006: I, 229). If this goal is reached, man deserves praise: *epist.* 76.10 (below: note 177).

¹⁶⁸ Sen. *epist.* 53.2: *ecce res magna, habere imbecillitatem hominis, securitatem dei.*

¹⁶⁹ Sen. *epist.* 9.16, 73.12.

¹⁷⁰ Sen. *epist.* 49.19, 61.4, 93.8, 101.5, *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).15.4 f., frg. 27 Haase = F 62 Vottero. More texts in Vottero 1998: 298. Cf. Bellincioni 1986: 20. For the Greek Stoics, cf., e.g., SVF III 54.

¹⁷¹ Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).1.5: *bonus tempore tantum a deo differt.* Mentally, however, the wise man is in possession of past, present, and future: *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).15.5.

though he is good for a longer time.¹⁷² As regards everything else, God and the good man are linked by a bond of friendship, or rather of kinship and similarity.¹⁷³

But Seneca proceeds even further: not only can the good man become equal to God, he can also become his collaborator. Prayer itself can be regarded as man's cooperation with the completion of the divine plan, as it demands its fulfillment;¹⁷⁴ but most of all it is by his acceptance of, and triumph over *fortuna* and the "evils" of this world (which Seneca's god, by his own admission, was not able to suppress because of matter's resistance to his power)¹⁷⁵ that the wise man re-establishes the rationality of the divine plan. The Stoic world is, in and by itself, only the best *possible* world; the wise man's recognition that the negative aspects of *fortuna* are morally irrelevant (*ἀδιάφορα*, *indifferentia*) amounts to his decisive contribution to the perfection of the world and the restoration of its impaired rationality.

In so doing the wise man surpasses God himself.¹⁷⁶ If man recognizes that only moral evil is real evil, and refuses to consider external disadvantages as evils, he has attained the perfection of his morality and of his reason—an achievement that goes to his credit.¹⁷⁷ God is exempt from the troubles of fortune and does not need to deny his consent to the false representations of evil. From this point of view, then, man is superior to God, because he is an ethical being, whereas God is not. God *cannot* commit evil¹⁷⁸ and has no need to choose between good and evil, as man must do. When man makes the right choice, he owes his goodness to himself. Seneca develops this idea from different points of view. Man surpasses God through his endurance, from which God is exempt;¹⁷⁹ he is superior to God through the bravery by which

¹⁷² Sen. *epist.* 73.13: *diutius bonus*; cf. 53.11.

¹⁷³ E.g., Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*) 1.5: *amicitiam dico? immo etiam necessitudo et similitudo*.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *supra*, § 7.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *supra*, note 54 (Sen. *dial.* 1 [= *prov.*] 6.6). See all of § 3. *Fortuna* (τύχη) was of course considered to be merely a cause escaping man's understanding in orthodox Stoicism, which could not conceive of mere chance (*SVF* II 965–973); but we have seen that according to Seneca (and Chrysippus) God's power is limited and that the failure on his part to create a perfect world is clearly envisaged (Sen. *nat.* 1 *pr.* 16: *supra*, note 53). See *supra*, pp. 298 f.

¹⁷⁶ No wonder this attitude raised the protest of several Catholic interpreters: e.g., Lagrange 1928: 342, Grammatico 1987: 143 f. (cf. *supra*, note 75).

¹⁷⁷ Sen. *epist.* 76.10: *laudabilis est et finem naturae suae tetigit*.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *supra*, note 94. Of course, the peculiar Stoic conception of moral responsibility considered the inborn incapability to commit evil just as praiseworthy: Sen. *frg.* 122 Haase = F 84 Vottero. Cf. Setaioli, *supra*, p. 288 n. 80.

¹⁷⁹ Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*) 6.6: *forte fortiter, hoc est quo deum anteceditis: ille extra patientiam malorum est, vos supra patientiam*. This and the texts quoted in the two following notes are pointed out by several scholars: e.g., Riesco Terrero 1966: 55 and n. 31.

he triumphs over fear;¹⁸⁰ finally, the wise man can be above God through the way he detaches himself from material goods.¹⁸¹

A tone of competition with God can be found rather often in Seneca. His wise man is not only God's disciple, but also his competitor.¹⁸² Seneca does not limit himself to depicting the wise man as challenging God in relation to happiness;¹⁸³ he even sketches his own ideal in these very terms.¹⁸⁴ It is surely a mistake to accuse Seneca of ὑβρις in this regard; but it would be equally wrong to consider Seneca's proclamation as an empty rhetorical flourish.¹⁸⁵ We should not be amazed when we find that St. Augustine condemns the Stoics' flaunting of virtue as false and arrogant.¹⁸⁶

Sometimes even "Promethean" tones of rebellion can be detected in Seneca.¹⁸⁷ Though he condemns such an attitude in the *De beneficiis*,¹⁸⁸ in the *De providentia*, the very work in which Seneca requests his readers to try their best in order to adapt to the severe upbringing to which that exacting *pater familias* that is God subjects them, the recurrent theme of man's proud independence, guaranteed by suicide, is expressed more audaciously than anywhere else. Seneca places in God's own mouth the exhortation to man to safeguard his independence at all cost, if necessary even by thrusting the gift of life back into nature's (i.e., God's)¹⁸⁹ face.¹⁹⁰ These words would

¹⁸⁰ Sen. *epist.* 53.15: *est aliquid quo sapiens antecedit deum: ille naturae beneficio non timet, suo sapiens*. Cf. 124.12.

¹⁸¹ Sen. *epist.* 73.14: *hoc se magis suspicit quod Iuppiter uti illis non potest, sapiens non vult*. Cf. Voelke 1973: 176 f. It should not escape our attention that here the wise man is pictured as aware of his superiority over God (*se magis suspicit*).

¹⁸² Sen. *epist.* 1.5: *discipulus eius aemulatorque*; or simply *aemulator dei* (*epist.* 124.23) and *deorum* [...] *aemulator* (*epist.* 59.18). Cf. Gentile 1932: 32 f.

¹⁸³ Sen. *epist.* 25.4, 110.18, 119.7. Here there are strong Epicurean echoes (cf. Epic. frg. 602 Usener); see Setaioli 1988: 195. However, at *epist.* 110.18–20 (a reported speech by Attalus) the Epicurean idea is corrected in a Stoic or Cynic sense. See the following note.

¹⁸⁴ Sen. *nat.* 6.32.5: *ipsis diis de felicitate controversiam facere*. Pascal 1906 believes Seneca's idea of man challenging the gods' happiness to be close to Epicurus's. Similar contacts with Epicurus are pointed out by Lo Moro 1976: 269–271 (cf. also Manning 1996: 317 f.); but it must be strongly emphasized that the Epicurean elements are totally integrated into Seneca's Stoic position. Cf. Mazzoli 1984: 955, Setaioli 1988: 240 n. 1086.

¹⁸⁵ As done by Rozelaar 1976: 473 f.

¹⁸⁶ Aug. *civ.* 19.4 (*fin.*): *quam beatitudinem isti philosophi [...] hic sibi conantur fabricare, quanto superbiore, tanto mendaciore virtute*. Cf. Mazzoli 1984: 972. The saint is (unconsciously?) echoed by several Catholic interpreters of Seneca's: cf. *supra*, notes 75, 176.

¹⁸⁷ As pointed out by Canfora 1999: 24.

¹⁸⁸ Sen. *benef.* 6.23.7 f.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *supra*, note 20.

¹⁹⁰ Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*) 6.8: *omne tempus, omnis vos locus doceat quam facile sit renuntiare naturae et munus illi suum impingere*.

appear sacrilegious if pronounced by anybody else but God.¹⁹¹ With a seeming paradox, Seneca has made God himself give his sanction to man's irrepressible need for independence.

¹⁹¹ It was indeed God who provided this way out, which guarantees man's independence: Sen. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).6.7: *ante omnia cavi ne quis vos teneret invitos; patet exitus*. Cf. *epist.* 12.10.

PART THREE

TRAGEDY

CONTEXT

Wolf-Lüder Liebermann

“‘Context’ means reinserting [...] clinically isolated words, images, ideas and actions into their living, pragmatic, social contexts. It means showing how all forms of expression are linked at the level of social thought and practice which we call culture in the broadest sense”¹—this is both a large claim and an understatement. Not surprisingly, context for the most part appears in the plural.² Above all, “text” and “context” do not suggest a clearly definable opposition—one is thereby deeply entwined in a hermeneutic configuration of problems from the start. The reconstruction of contexts depends upon an understanding of the text, where contexts, on their part, come into play.

Contextual classification and an appreciation of Senecan tragedies are subject to the strongest fluctuations and uncertainties. This might result from the fact that the work not only represents a phenomenon of reception (which is, as is well known, in no way a bar to originality), but is also to an extreme extent hallmarked by artistic refinement and an intellectuality rich in associations.³ That aesthetic pleasure results from such refinement is indisputable. At the same time, however, a broad range of interpretation becomes possible, which was used excessively over the past decades and may account for the “Seneca industry” (cf. Boyle 1997: viii). General verdicts on literature, even the inclusion of “mannerist”⁴ conceptions, should confer a theoretic legitimacy. However, interpretive positions emerged much earlier and have been preserved in a distinctive way.

That Seneca’s tragedies require a unique poetics has been reiterated ad nauseam. That this is true, however, does not preclude comparison. On the contrary, comparison possesses cognitive value, and only through it do contours emerge and the terms used receive their specific meaning. The term “static,” which certainly applies to Senecan as opposed to Attic tragedy, has a completely different significance if one considers Seneca in relation to, for

¹ Csapo in Csapo and Miller 2003: preface.

² Cf. Davis 2003: 9–18 (historical, biographical, literary-historical aspect).

³ Mayer (1990) especially emphasized Seneca’s literary craftsmanship in relation to mythological learnedness.

⁴ Regarding the set of problems surrounding the term, cf. Liebermann 2004: 32 n. 85.

example, baroque drama. All the concepts with which we operate stand in opposition to other concepts and cannot therefore be taken as absolutes, because doing so results in misunderstandings and otherwise avoidable disputes. No value judgment is connected to the comparison.

Rhetoric unquestionably represents a constitutive element of Seneca's tragedies. Although rhetoric or the declamatory background could not be overlooked, it has been considered good form to polemicize against the designation "rhetorical." Michel (1969), in a trend-setting article, then proved the rhetorical to be an integral element of Senecan philosophy as well as of the dramas; Billerbeck (1988) energetically pursued a rehabilitation of the *tragoedia rhetorica*. The underlying question is: Which function does the rhetorical accomplish (a consideration which, of necessity, recognizes the variables associated with the term)? Wilson (1983), e.g., considered rhetoric a requisite element of dramatic structure and Senecan thought; Galimberti-Biffino (1996) not only bases Seneca's affinity to Ovid on it, but integrates it generally into the formation of persons and myths; for Bishop (1985) it provides a uniform "code"; and for Schindel (2003) it recently has become the basic vantage point for Seneca's new poetics. Boyle (1997) subjugates "the declamatory style" to the overarching concept of "theatricality," which forms the signum of an age, of imperial Rome, a "world of actors," a world of role-playing, whereby the difference between "reality" and "theatre" was made to vanish, whereby rhetoric and life were to form a unity.⁵ For good reason, the rhetorical in Seneca was linked with his intellectualism (Petrone 2001)—in the case of Cicero the interlinking of rhetoric and skeptical intellectualism has long been applied. Casamento (2002), and more importantly, Goldberg (1996)⁶ and Hook⁷ propounded putting rhetorical *declamatio* and Seneca's drama into a close context. The latter subtly reduces Seneca's characters, their self-knowledge and self-presentation, to the rhetoric of declamatory exercises, which explicitly not only creates a contrast to Shakespeare's Hamlet and to modern drama itself, but also has implications for a psychological reading of the tragedies.

The oft-repeated reference to T.S. Eliot's dictum of 1927: "the drama is all in the word" is closely connected. A question thereby arises: what does that

⁵ The metaphorical meaning of theatricality, however, should not be underestimated; an inference to stage performances of the tragedies is deceptive.

⁶ The rhetorically determined reliance on language, in contrast to action and spectacle, holds almost the same status as the "salvation of tragedy" (284), see also Goldberg in Harrison 2000a: 209–231.

⁷ In Harrison 2000a: 53–71.

mean, or more precisely, which opposition is being formed?⁸ When Eliot continues, “And the word has no further reality behind it” (Eliot 1934b: 68), he creates an opposition to vital reality (as well as to the always differing realities of the characters). In Voßler’s (1930: 247 f.) contemporaneous research paper, this is defined more strictly: the word as “substitute” for the stage creates a “word stage,” which falls short of the probable and human reality. This is based on the prevalent presumption that the stage in general should reproduce human reality and that only there is the “wirkliche Tragik” (true tragic quality) to be found. But Seneca opens up an “intellectual and spiritual force field of unlimited possibilities” (a fictitious world), which can be classified as “persuasion by the art of Seneca.” For one thing, the precise descriptive categories are remarkable. For another, it clearly shows the possibility of opposing the artificiality of the (persuasive) word to human reality and the stage (for both are one). These categories demonstrate a remarkable consistency, but things appear to change (or merely to be reshuffled and re-evaluated), as soon as either dramatic literature is awarded a function quite different from the reproduction of reality or the reality of the first century AD is viewed as “abnormal.”

The question of scenic realization not only stands analogous to that, but systematically ties in with it. Lanza (1981) emphasized “evocazione” of the word as opposed to “rappresentazione,” which would suggest an almost critical extension of scenic space. The term “occhi dell’ascoltatore” (471) falls into this context.⁹ Concrete realization can therefore be counterproductive as well.¹⁰ This includes the imagination (visualization before the “inner eye”) as an important component of dramatic perception,¹¹ which, as little as it results from theatricality, should in no way be considered on a par with scenic visualization.¹²

⁸ Mastronarde (1970) placed Eliot’s observation within the framework of a suggestiveness constituted by words and imagery and a drama of connotations. That this approach, which is hardly disputed, suggests a philological, not a transitory (performance or recitation) interpretation, is self-evident; cf. also Tarrant 1985: 15 on “the ultimate goal of publication.”

⁹ Cf. also Zwierlein 2004: II 81–85.

¹⁰ It is known that “an increase in imagination on the part of the audience is affected by a limitation of the spectacular” (Primavesi 2006: 186).

¹¹ Cacquet 1997: 2: “la parole fait le spectacle” (cf. 44); Fantham in Harrison 2000a: 23: “visualization in words”; Dupont 1995: 2000: “spectacle des mots.” This does not always tie in clearly with visual “spectacles,” which leads to a stereotypical connection of “images vocales” and “images scéniques.” Predominance is awarded to the word, for the “spectacle de l’altérité” is achieved by “mots de fiction” (2000: 10 f.); only they are capable of creating “images virtuelles”—by explicit recourse to rhetorical figures (2000: 30). Cf. now Kugelmeier 2007.

¹² It is enlightening, in this context, that, for example, Fury and Tantalus are considered to be present from the prologue of *Thyestes* throughout the play—before the inner eye! The word actuates the *oculi mentis* (Quint. *inst.* 8.3.62).

The debate surrounding the intention of staging and stageability has run a frustrating course (although the observations made therein are of course helpful). Part of the reason is that elementary preconditions remain unexplained: wherein does the specific achievement of a production consist or which is the particular function one assigns to it? Even deliberations regarding productive procedures in the face of a demonstrated underlying variety (conventional tragedy clearly does not constitute a focal point therein) led to no reliable result (whether in public or private theatres, whether productions of entire plays or individual scenes, etc.).¹³ The question—a question, admittedly, that can be posed also about other dramas of world literature—can only be whether enactment, and that means eidetic concretization (the objection of naturalism is not valid here), is advantageous to or even necessary for the plays or not. Here one must make sufficient allowance for the imaginary as well as differentiate it from concreteness.¹⁴ The former permits irregularities in the plastic concretization, even necessitates them (just as it does the symbolic, if not for emotional then for reflective reasons). Here, again, the audience's viewpoint should be contrasted with that superimposed by the director. Only the latter can be brought to bear as a reference for the necessity of production. E.A. Schmidt (2001)¹⁵ addresses precisely this point by elevating the debate surrounding staging to a new level. To him, an immediately convincing semantization of space in Seneca is essential: on the one hand, that of imagined space ("Wortkulisse"¹⁶ [word scenery] is part of it); on the other hand, and almost deduced from it (344), that of the stage itself.¹⁷ Above all, the so-called "retrospective implicit stage commands" are brought to bear on the fact that semantisizing the stage goes hand in hand with its concrete visualization, the realization on stage (that, in the case of the realm of the imaginary, is completely different from the start).

¹³ Brief overviews in Fitch in Harrison 2000a: 1–7, Littlewood 2004: 2–4, Aygon in Dumont 2006: 143 f. (with *ibid.* 91–112); a considerate presentation in Tarrant 1985: 13–15.

¹⁴ Fitch (in Harrison 2000a: 10) also denotes a rivalry between imagination and realization on stage: "enactment with its visual effects would compete in a distracting way with the spoken word and its appeal to the imagination." One can hardly expect a spectator to abstract from concretization in a production (presence of the chorus, but not "present" in a dramatic sense," *ibid.* 9), so that, as solutions, only excerpt-performances remain.

¹⁵ Continued by Schmidt in Liebermann 2004: 344–353.

¹⁶ The term has been adapted from the theoretic-systematic outline by Manfred Pfister (1977 [2001]), who relies especially on Shakespeare research; it is strongly reminiscent of Voßler's "word stage" (cf. *supra*).

¹⁷ The fact that one could substantiate the importance of the symbolic virtual space in Tacitus (Malissard in Garelli-François (1998): 211–224) proves that an immediate inference to stage realization can hardly be possible.

This, however, raises the question as to whether production with a clarifying and disambiguating function is not presupposed and whether the suspense resulting from the correlating openness of the wealth of allusions, innuendos, and references typical of Seneca, is not metabolized.¹⁸ Terms such as “fantastic” and “over-realistic” are applicable precisely to Seneca’s mode of representation.¹⁹ That visualization, in the sense of the evocation of mental images, is a central topic of rhetoric should be especially stressed.²⁰ One should not forget, either, that the fourth Pompeian style, the affinity of which to Seneca’s dramas is acknowledged, is in no way a realistic, but rather an imaginative style of fancy (the concretization in the image is hardly comparable with the one on the stage). Results from mime and pantomime research, which have of late experienced an enormous amount of attention, cannot be prematurely transferred to Seneca’s dramas; one must also be on guard against a sweeping euphoria regarding orality and spectatorship—which of course is understandable in the age of the “media human.”

Classifying Seneca’s tragedies into their *literary context* in 1978 gave G.A. Seeck a theoretical basis: literature lives via an “inner automatism”—“literature generates literature.”²¹ The long-practiced method of a genre-specific approach is determined by this concept,²² as is the genre-spanning inclusion of (especially) Augustan poetry, the significance of which has gained increasing importance. A formal as well as a content-related aspect results from the recourse to literary tradition, which, however, can barely be differentiated.²³

¹⁸ This certainly holds true for the argumentation strategy by Braun (especially 1982) and others, whereby performance is indispensable to the comprehension of the recipient. The frequently used argument, that some things are unclear without gesture, etc., is significant here.

¹⁹ Whereas generally the deniers of performance are charged with a naturalistic prejudice, Speyer (2003) seeks to vindicate for Seneca real communicative patterns (of everyday language), (psychic) realism, and naturalism and to render them fertile with regard to a scenic production (in contradiction to 300 = 306). This approach, however, is hardly convincing.

²⁰ In that the fact that the theoreticians of forensic rhetoric emphasize credibility and probability (that is, as a representation of reality) plays no role—the debates within rhetoric demonstrate that breaches against it were practiced and that poetry (*mythos*) in general is ascribed to anything that transcends credible reality (cf. Webb in Braund and Gill 1997: 112–127).

²¹ Seeck in Lefèvre 1978a: 378–426; cf. Liebermann’s (2004: 30–36) elaboration.

²² For a brief overview to “genre context,” see Töchterle 1994: 22–29.

²³ After, for example, Runchina (1960) had strengthened the literary tradition (not only the dramatic one) emerging from Euripides and then Landfester in 1974 had pointed out the advancement of metaphorical speech in Seneca, the call for an expansion from diction and expression toward characterization and dramatic ideas increased (Tarrant 1978: 262).

If an approach intrinsic to literature is strongly represented, as is best accomplished by Otto Zwierlein and his school,²⁴ then the presupposed context exercises a conspicuous effect on the text and its comprehension. Even though interpretation still vacillates between literary continuity and discontinuity, the prevalent parameters remain set. The consequence is that Seneca's autonomy is owed to literary ambitions and stimuli from literature are in the background. Autonomy is even facilitated by a contamination of patterns and archetypes, which in turn can produce unresolved remnants. These, however, are not relevant to Seneca's purposes (a coherent characterization, for example). The author's recourse to literary tradition assumes a knowledge of this tradition on the part of the recipient; it serves to clarify otherwise blurred and ambiguous states of affairs (the identification of a "pseudologia," for example). The Greek tragedy, myth crafted by literature, Virgil and Ovid, and Seneca's antique imitators count as decisive indicators²⁵ of interpretation. This approach can explicitly conflict with other approaches, once a proof of the literary model renders an actualizing political-historical interpretation superfluous, or even excludes it.²⁶ Correspondingly significant is the restraint toward influences from philosophy—e.g., Stoic cosmology²⁷—that are foreign to the poetry. In principle, the origin of a motive does not immediately disclose anything about its use in a new context,²⁸ but when "literary creation" moves within a literary context and essentially aims for augmentation of the traditional, then the importance of the literary tradition is justified.²⁹

It is evident that the literary context includes even conventional problems of the genre derived from Greek tragedy, like that involving the tragic and heroism (the tragic hero). This occasionally means that Seneca's drama

²⁴ See, for example, Zwierlein 2004: I 1–56, 57–136, Zwierlein 1978.

²⁵ For a methodological justification, see Zwierlein 2004: I 29.

²⁶ Ibid. 126 n. 173. More poignantly formulated in the first edition.

²⁷ Cf. Schmitz 1993.

²⁸ Ibid. 11, especially n. 28.

²⁹ Similar phenomena can be observed in R.J. Tarrant, the advocate of a literarily immanent way of understanding within the Anglo-Saxon realm (calling special attention to Roman literature and the general Romanization connected to it, especially in Tarrant 1995). However, different interpretative approaches have a stronger influence here, so that a philosophically founded, didactic-moralistic intention in Seneca's work is accepted, which forces the localization of a fascination attested to Medea and Atreus beyond the author's conscious intentions (1985: 24 f.). A repudiation of a definition of Seneca's poetics "in and of itself" (1978: 214—the literary historical component is expressively reclaimed), however, finds its consequent realization in a "Neronian perspective" on Ovid ("dark readings of the canonical works of Augustan literature," 2002: 350, 360), cf. Tarrant in Volk and Williams 2006: 1–5.

approximates the conceptions of Greek tragedy or is identified with them sometimes, but not always (even *aemulatio* contains innovation). In the case of “tragedy” and “the tragic,” the matter is complicated by the notorious ambiguity of the terms,³⁰ as demonstrated recently in *Rome et le tragique*.³¹ Whether, however, unspecific usages such as “tragic emotion” and “tragic atmosphere” facilitate a cognitive gain, is questionable.

To that (variously accentuated) preconceptions of what is represented by a tragedy are added: human condition and human action (since Aristotle), underlying questions of human existence, moral conflicts, competing ideologies, guilt and punishment, subjective and objective guilt, the meaning of the gods, and so on, but also the dimension of the individual, individual characters, characters responding to situations, inner conflicts—in short, a depiction of the world and its people. A wealth of perspectives (especially in a drama with several characters), openness, and a variety of meanings are imbedded in the representative moment that is applicable to literature per se (along with the interpretative accomplishment demanded of the recipient). Herein the entire spectrum of literary interpretation takes effect, even if it is shifted to its literary sources.³² The apparent restraint of a perspective intrinsic to literature, which seemingly warrants reliability, is an illusion. This becomes accentuated in the question of differentiations (“quality of difference”). Even if focusing exclusively on the artistic process, one addresses issues of counter-bidding and augmentation, of pathos and culmination, of refinement and virtuosity, and claims rhetoric for it or speaks of mannerism with respect to a demonstrative artistry (a combination of continuity and discontinuity, a demarcation against the conventional). If, however, rhetoric on the one hand and mannerism on the other, are understood as signa of an age, they then become a category within the history of ideas with more than mere formal aesthetic implications. Even an approach that is decidedly intrinsic

³⁰ Cf. the constructive contribution by Lanza 1996.

³¹ Garelli-François 1998. This interesting volume suffers (cf. the remark by Jocelyn, *ibid.* 297) from the non-differentiation of a phenomenological description of the term “tragic” from the term “tragedy” (see Staiger 1946 [1964]; cf. the detailed debate on the problems clustering around “genre”). Additionally, terms such as “tragic,” “dramatic,” and “theatrical” overlap. It clarifies little, if tragedy is classified as an intertext of the historian, which, however, exerted no “influence,” since intertextuality is displayed as a phenomenon of reading, not of text production (Späth in Garelli-François 1998: 191 n. 78).

³² A paradigmatic case is the promotion of Seneca as “Virgil’s tragic future” (Putnam 1995): the interpretation of the *Aeneid* prefigures an understanding of Seneca’s dramas and (at least partially) vice versa (cf. *supra* n. 29). This is a largely practiced procedure—the political claim of Virgil and other Augustan poets is explicitly transferred to Seneca by Baldini Moscadi 1998: 21–25.

to literature must resort to other cultural systems, even if it reconstrues literary history as an interplay of question and answer according to reception theory. This is hardly surprising, given that literature (even the fictional and utopic) always stands in relation to life (in which relation, in each case, is of course the question)—a phenomenon, hermeneutically dealt with in part under the aspect of the occasional, in part under that of historicity, which has been convincingly adapted by literary criticism. (That is the actual cultural-historical point.) Everything depends on the clarification or realization of the underlying conception of literature—including the details of concrete interpretation. However, a recourse to the literary motivation of Seneca's work and an approach intrinsic to literature can create a framework of orientation, which does not need an additional justification (biographical or other).

The term "intertextuality" seems to confer upon this approach an all-encompassing theoretical foundation,³³ but such an assumption is problematic.³⁴ Whereas those who deal with it seriously on a theoretical basis and are well acquainted with the problems generated by the complexity of the term have developed a fertile, differentiated, methodological system of analysis, "intertextuality" is frequently misused in a way that seeks to lend an appearance of legitimacy to any interpretation—without any further deliberation about complex questions such as those involving allusion, quotation, and so on, without differentiation of individual text- and system-references (and their mutual interrelation), without regarding degrees of reference and their demarcation, and without a precise reflection about categories such as production and reception.³⁵ Above all, one has to consider that the dignity of intertextuality derives especially from a universal intertextuality that comprises other symbolic systems as well (the world as text—a notion that has been transferred into post-structuralist conceptions). This may have to be dissociated from the generally practiced, merely literary intertextuality;³⁶

³³ We owe this ultimately to a constructivism established by the "subjectivity of modernity," the last consequence of which was the post-structural dissolution of the subject itself. Therefore, a particularly careful diligence is demanded when applying it to classical texts (as one is well aware in the discussion of theory).

³⁴ Julia Kristeva, from whom this term originated, recalled it due to its having been so frequently misused.

³⁵ These questions have been debated extensively not only in reception aesthetics, but also in the theory of the constitution of genres (genre as a pattern for orientation?).

³⁶ Once universal intertextuality has been proven as hardly operational and not conducive to practical considerations, the result cannot be to apply the term intertextuality in its narrower sense, but instead, when dealing with a precise differentiation, to play the card of universal intertextuality and perhaps even to take refuge in a reader-based arbitrariness.

which—as has been recognized—approximates the established research of sources and influences.³⁷ The context-relations transcending the system “literature” threaten to get lost in such a restricted intertextuality, so that it seems necessary to recuperate the text-context-relation under the banner of cultural-historically oriented literary studies.³⁸

The *psychological context* must be subsumed under the literary context: it does justice to the traditional conception of literature—especially of drama—as representing the human being and the humane; moreover, the after-effect of Seneca’s dramas is frequently moored to a psychologization that anticipates modernity. Introspection, interiority, egotism, self-analysis, self-representation, and self-dramatization are considered hallmarks of Seneca’s isolated figures, implicating a radical subjectification (one capturing the dramas as a whole and formally reflected in lyricization). It may be that after the Roman elegy, Virgil and, most significantly, Ovid, a new concept of the ego had to be formulated, one that exists in modernity. Certainly, however, this modern concept of the ego cannot be attributed to Seneca himself (Shakespeare research, for example, emphatically marks the differences between Seneca and Shakespeare with regard to psychology).³⁹ As is well known, scientific philosophy tends to attribute “subjectivity,” “individuality,” “identity,” “individual unity,” the “self,” and “interiority” in the proper sense to late antiquity and the post-Augustinian age.⁴⁰ This must be categorically considered when speaking of self-representation, of self-construction and self-destruction, and of the struggle for identity and loss of identity.⁴¹ The selfhood exposed by Braden (especially 1985) as an essential part of the Senecan tradition significantly fuelled such a classification of the psychology inherent in the Senecan drama (even if Braden himself distinctly refers to the moment of further development and advancement). It is remarkable

³⁷ Even the contention that research based on sources and influences would only reveal the origins of a literary work and outline the path from the former to the latter is in part suspect. It ignores the reception moment in the conscious recourse to the former (a mere “passive reception” is not more than a construct, which is necessary, in order to deconstruct it emphatically) and its meaning. What else does “leave traces” mean other than having an influence? Where, however—via the reader—“traces” of later texts come into play in chronologically earlier texts (cf. Fowler 2000: especially 115–137), the central hermeneutic problem is exemplified.

³⁸ Cf. Gymnich, Neumann, and Nünning 2006.

³⁹ Cf. also *supra* p. 406.

⁴⁰ Of particular significance is H. Blumenberg and C. Taylor, but also P. Brown and J.-P. Vernant. Further information can be found in numerous works by C. Gill (especially 1994, 1996, 2006).

⁴¹ Cf. *infra* p. 471.

that a convincing connection not only to classical heroism results from this approach, but expressly also to Stoic philosophy (including a political indifference relevant to Senecan interpretation). The complementary reverse is if one decides to see a failure of the great dramatic characters in their neglect of the outside world (in the moral as well as in the political sense) and therein, depending on the underlying conception, an affirmation or critique of the Stoic *sapiens*. The literary (and intellectual) context is significantly enhanced, in psychological and ethical terms, by the *philosophical context*.

Doubts, however, arise regarding the parallelization (with whatever result) of the tragic protagonists and the Stoic *sapiens*, involving the “self” (and its relation to the world). The categories and criteria applied in this debate are often confusing. It is first necessary to separate the aesthetic from the ethical and to admit that the classical unity of the aesthetic and the moral has been ruptured in Seneca’s dramas. Only this can explain the now hardly contested fascination with Seneca’s “consequent villains.” The aesthetic almost supersedes the ethical. Furthermore, in Seneca’s protagonists, the malicious and the disastrous is concentrated, but only as a particular manifestation of a pervasive condition. In this respect, the characters are obligated to themselves and to their names—in short, to their roles. Therein lie their absoluteness and their “Unhintergebarkeit.” Whether this phenomenon can be subordinated to the topic of the “ego” is open to question. Even with regard to the Stoic *sapiens*, it is unconvincing, since his self-control and control by others serves an evaluation along generally accepted norms. The retreat to a (normative!) ego only takes place when coping with what could be called the contingency of this world is at stake (almost as a compromise), but not per se: in case of formative action, the world will not disappear. The norms of action, however, are based neither in this world, nor within the “I”. One should not misunderstand the Stoic’s self-reliance. If one, however, supposes that his disinterest in the world is compensated for by the world as audience, and consequently creates an analogy to the stage, caution is needed. On the one hand, the morally superior action functions as a model requiring a spectator. On the other hand, the spectator assumes the role of a judge. In that sense, the spectator is indispensable as a witness (in the face of the universal validity of the judging criteria this can be replaced by self-witnessing, Sen. *epist.* 25.6); acknowledgment and admiration are based on that necessity. A specific systematic position pertains to the audience within ethical discourse. An indispensable basis of this concept is moral assessment (Sen. *dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].2.7–12). To be sure, the unity between the aesthetic and the ethical is preserved in the philosophical realm: anger is simply ugly, a category not transferable to the dramatic characters. However, moral aesthetics and the aesthetics of

the tragedy differ. Thus, Stoic philosophy and Seneca's tragedies are barely commensurable with one another, not even with regard to contrast.⁴²

Indisputably, in the depiction of the passions and emotions, categories of Stoic (and Roman) psychology, of the contrast between madness and reason, find their application. (Here psychoanalytical or pre-psychoanalytical observations can find a space as well.) The philosophical discourse on the passions has recently elicited strong interest.⁴³ The integration of the *moral* aspect is necessarily connected with internal conflict and psychological disintegration. Self-consciousness becomes an element of the psychological-ethical system (occasionally expressed in confrontation with a literary approach oriented to self-realization and self-creation). It is certainly no longer possible to do without that relevant research activity, but it settles neither the issue that a psychological-ethical dilemma animates or motivates the tragedies nor that herein lies a didactic moment.⁴⁴ Description and recommendation are to be differentiated;⁴⁵ significantly, interpreters must refer to the phenomenon of "reality" in slightly differing versions, as long as they adhere to the rivalry between philosophical (comprising psychology and ethics) and literary systems and with good reason are unwilling to accept the latter either as a simplistic negative confirmation or as a criticism (up to a revelation of the proper truth).⁴⁶

Personal responsibility and human guilt play a central role within the framework of Stoic philosophy. They can only conditionally be claimed to apply to the tragedies—the disturbing factors must then be ascribed to

⁴² Edwards (in Easterling and Hall 2002: 377–394) confines tragedies and Stoa within the formulation of "self-consciousness about one's own role" (386), which rather evades the issue. That it can hardly be a question of individual or identity, especially within the context of philosophy, applies as well to the *persona*-theory in Cic. *off.* 1.107–121, which is likely to be cited in this context and orientates itself on Panaetius. Its focal point is a design for living that aligns itself with a universal norm. Given existing contingencies, coherence and consistency are important—neither the second nor the fourth *persona* allows for a proper interest in the individual and the personal character (cf. Guastella 2005).

⁴³ I am referring to Brunschwig and Nussbaum 1993 and Braund and Gill 1997; see also Gill (*supra* n. 40).

⁴⁴ The phrasing, traceable to Giancotti 1953, of an antithesis of *furor* and *mens bona* as "idea-madre" of Seneca's tragedies has continued to take effect.

⁴⁵ Cf. *infra* p. 470. The decisive factor is hierarchization. In focusing on the philosophic-ethical-psychological subject matter a transition of description to recommendation would almost be compelling.

⁴⁶ See also the differentiated observations regarding the *dramatis personae* in the context of psychology and morale in Garton 1972. The more principal problems of an application of psychology (especially everyday psychology) to ancient tragedy (which in the extreme case can deteriorate into bourgeois morality) should be ignored here; cf., e.g., Gould 2001: 78–111.

the literary-mythological material or to rhetoric or must in part be forcibly homogenized.⁴⁷ But even the cosmic sympathy accentuated by Rosenmeyer (1989) does not bear up as a genuine philosophical core of the tragedies (cf. Schmitz 1993).⁴⁸ In all cases, instead of the “Stoic base” (Pratt 1948) one arrives at hardly more than a “Stoic (or neo-Stoic) background” and a “reduced Stoicism.”⁴⁹

The *political context* has gained much attention. The term “political,” however, has been used in a variety of ways, such as to equate Roman tragedy generally with political tragedy. Eckard Lefèvre,⁵⁰ in a treatise on the typology of the Roman drama, undertook the theoretical foundation for a political and ideological interpretation, which he endeavored to carry out in various individual interpretations (with an increasing emphasis upon the “political” in the narrow, concretely historical sense).⁵¹ According to that perspective, Roman tragedy is an “atypical” literary phenomenon; it is “freely accessible” and can be put into the service of *virtus*-ideology and the historical sense of the Romans—affirmatively uplifting or, at the time of the empire, oppositional, whereby psychology and philosophy (Stoicism) are integrated into the sought-for political goal: the individual cast back upon himself and “an ideology of self-assertion against the state.”

It is necessary, in a limited way, to disregard concrete correlations to historical persons and events. These are certainly not excluded, but must remain speculative. On the whole, these correlations are not sufficient to gain access to the tragedies.

Now, however, it is symptomatic that concrete references and identifications frequently form a precondition for political interpretation. Only by application to Nero, Agrippina, and the like can a political moment of

⁴⁷ The attempt to reclaim the idea of *providentia* from *Oedipus* (Aygon in Garelli-François 1998: 135–148; cf. Aygon 2004, especially 406–425) is part of it. A kind of synthesis can be found in Tarrant in Volk and Williams 2006: 1–17; it is significant that Tarrant’s cautious and circumspect contribution—*Seeing Seneca whole?*—became the title of the entire volume, but without the not unimportant question mark!

⁴⁸ The observations by Volk (in Volk and Williams 2006: 183–200) with regard to *Thyestes* confirm that, in part explicitly, in part unintentionally.

⁴⁹ Cf. Liebermann 2004: 21–27. Wiener 2006 is hardly of any help. The attempt to prove once again that Stoic doctrine (“Moraldidaxe”) provides the basis of Seneca’s tragedies does not energetically address decisive problems (guilt, responsibility, fate). The either-or (“double perspectivism,” “in addition,” “despite the fact”) remains unclear. To neutralize the unsolved remnants as a “litmus test” (one cannot compare Lucan here), “to harrowingly make one aware of the problem even within Stoic doctrine in its almost inhuman complexity” (loc. cit. 126–129) is difficult to reconstrue. Cf. *infra* p. 470.

⁵⁰ Lefèvre 1978a: 1–90.

⁵¹ Lefèvre 1985a has become especially effective.

utterances result that really are of a general nature (e.g., concerning modes of lifestyles). This applies as well if *Oedipus*, for example, is being understood as a call to revolution while rejecting a literalism congenial to a superficial reading.⁵²

A widely held opinion, however, maintains that the political should be inferred from general statements. Concepts such as *rex* and *regnum* then become code words that are understood as political demarcations in the anti-tyrannical sense. Picone (1984) has argued this energetically and effectively—with *furor*, *error*, *nefas*, and *fraus* as system-immanent implications, which can be extended: with *exilium* as contrast, under which *otium* is subsumed. The topical endangerment of the powerful and mighty (and of the rich!), the problematization of the *res magnae* and *res secundae*, the contrast between town and country are constricted into a narrowly political statement. Thyestes, who a priori is afraid of his brother but not of the *regnum* (*Thy.* 473), is corrupted allegedly because of his hope for royal power, and the nurse suggests to Hippolytus that he accept the perverse system of the *regnum* (of the imperial court) with its demands.⁵³ But when Horace says (*epist.* 1.10.32 f.), “*fuge magna: licet sub paupere tecto / reges et regum vita praecurrere amicos*,” is it necessary to understand this as political and anti-tyrannical as well? Moreover, kings at all times and by definition constitute a resource for tragedies.⁵⁴

Assigning “tyrannical” character traits to Medea is the result of a methodological-interpretative prejudice. The “tyrant as fiend” (according to Opelt 1951) presupposes an identification of the tyrant. In no way can we equate the “fiend” with the tyrant, which would be nothing else but a “theme-rheme confusion.” A comparison with Roman political invective can be instructive: the political results from the foregoing identification of the enemy as a political enemy; the evil “tragedy-tyrant” serves as a moral deconstruction of the opponent.⁵⁵

⁵² Bishop 1977–1978 and 1985.

⁵³ Lo Piccolo (in Biondi 1998: 209–235) is paradigmatic. One simply takes the political (that is, anti-tyrannical) meaning of the tragedy (214) for granted, power and *regnum* are equated, and the antithesis that is typical of Seneca requires one to find its opposite in the *exilium/otium*.

⁵⁴ Epictetus states that tragedies take place among rich men, kings, and tyrants (1.24.15). The right or wrong use of power remains a topic of discussion, but that is a psychological-moral, not a political, question, which in principle hardly transcends the accepted, not only in tragedy, but also in other literary genres (cf. *infra* p. 463 with n. 18).

⁵⁵ Dunkle 1967 emphasizes, as essential features of the Greek “tragedy-tyrant” adopted in Rome, *vis*, *superbia*, *libido*, and *crudelitas*.

The same applies even to *De clementia*, which is often quoted as a parallel: the political figure of Nero as addressee creates behavioral guidelines and reflections about good and bad government, which in turn represent the application of universally valid philosophical-moral rules in the realm of the *regnum* (cf. Bellincioni 1984b).⁵⁶ The idea that the effect of uncontrolled power can be abolished by means of voluntary constraint is only not naïve or unrealistic if one takes its moral foundation into account. This should not be assigned to an analysis of power and only conditionally to a political discourse.⁵⁷ Where *De clementia* is truly understood politically, this results from a text-external discourse (Nero and the opposition of the Senate). That power in itself is evil, that absolute power corrupts absolutely and leads to destruction and self-destruction (the “tragedy of power”), Tacitus demonstrates in a much more convincing way.

The advantage of such an interpretation lies in the fact that it becomes clear that the powerful, that is, the tyrant, dominates the scene, or, more precisely, that in the figure of the powerful the negative, the evil (and the suffering associated with it) is omnipresent and unstoppable, that within dramatic action—from the distribution of forces and the attractiveness connected with it—no alternative is available. If one wanted to enforce a political alternative, and to integrate it into the dramatic action, one would have to rely on the chorus and on “weak” personae propagating an escape from the *regnum*, the *obscura quies*. The absurd consequence thereof is that politics abolishes itself. The aporia of a political interpretation caused by the dramatic structure casts a light on the critical potential of interpretations of all kinds (even a moral one).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The general rules apply in particular to the emperor based on the conditions and consequences connected with his absolute power: on the freedom from all contingencies, which facilitates an ideal form of moral behavior, and on the unlimited radius of the impact of his actions.

⁵⁷ Political elements remain on the periphery or are presupposed. *Maiestas* appears as *magna fortuna* of the royal position and is almost replaced by *magnus animus*; a general definition of the terms *magnitudo/magnus* seems to be in the background (*dial.* 3 [= *de ira* 1].20f.). *Servitus* can only be applied to the ruler, because it has been relieved of its political significance.

⁵⁸ Schubert (1998) attempted to reclaim from Seneca's tragedies an analysis of the autocracy and the system-immanent process of its perversion. In principle, such an analysis is a continuation of Picone 1984 and others. Those confronted with the indispensable negativity of the system are powerless. Their powerlessness, however, then becomes interpreted as Seneca's self-justification and his failure as an educator and political advisor to Nero (the tragedies are all dated to Nero's reign). The basic starting point now is not the political importance of the Roman drama, but the “enmeshment of politics and literature” in the Neronian period, which

Complexity and a wide variety of references are the pre-eminent phenomena of Seneca's tragedies. They can hardly be met with a "both/and" response, with an unsystematic combination of aesthetic, literary, ethical, philosophical, and political perspectives, nor with the subjective and decisionist assessments that are especially prominent in Seneca research ("in my opinion," "as I am completely convinced," etc.).⁵⁹

Consequently, a "meta-dramatic" and "meta-theatrical" reading becomes understandable (after Picone 1984, primarily Boyle, e.g., 1988: 94–97, 1997: 112–137,⁶⁰ Schiesaro 2003, and Littlewood 2004).⁶¹ One must concede that Roman poetry—more so than ancient Greek or even Hellenistic poetry, which instead focuses on questions of quality—presents self-reflection about origin, essence, capability, effectiveness, and recipients of literary works (which may stand in direct relation to the fact that Roman literature had to gain its position within the social structure and to continuously defend it). Yet it is arguable whether what can be assigned in terms of self-awareness and self-reflection to artistic natures, and above all to Ovid, can be applied to Seneca.

Most important, interpretive certainty cannot be attained through this. A "meta-poetic" reading does not impart control over the text and its signification bequeathed by the author, because each relevant textual information and its interpretation require a hermeneutic reflection and self-reflection (last, but not least, in terms of its explicit or latent prejudice). The differences in the resulting interpretations clearly attest to that.

In fact, the meta-dramatic approach, as impressively represented by Schiesaro (2003),⁶² essentially wishes to turn the self-reflective author into a warrantor of dramatic interpretation.⁶³ But if passions, violence, *scelus* and

reveals itself as the "directioning of all writing toward the emperor" and is to be derived from his artistic interests (11, differently accentuated 415 f.).

⁵⁹ Certainly, the tragedies differ from one another, yet they are all recognizable as "Senecan dramas."

⁶⁰ Boyle predominantly emphasizes the "meta-theatrical," which would aim at the reflection of a "palimpsestic world on the verge of dissolution" (Boyle 1997: 90; cf. *supra* p. 406); see also Rosenmeyer 1989: 47–56, who attempts to locate it within the framework of the Stoa.

⁶¹ This has long been negotiated under the code word "(work immanent) poetic reflection" and similar concepts.

⁶² Earlier works by Schiesaro have been integrated into this publication.

⁶³ This obviously is not an unfounded assumption (despite, e.g., 7, 16 f.), for it is the author (respectively the self-reflective text), who on the one hand purports openness and ambiguity by means of contrasts, contradictions, and conflicts, and on the other hand makes obvious the literary features by developing an awareness of constructedness. The metadramatic approach leads to the fact that the behavior of the spectator/reader is regarded as exemplarily

nefas, horror, unavoidable destiny, and the unconscious become characteristics of a chthonic poetry and a poetic creation imparting a deeper truth, which stands in contrast to reason and morality and represents an increasing repetition of the preceding *furor*-inspired poetry, the underlying ideas and the implications (Romantic and post-Romantic, Freudian and post-Freudian conceptions) cannot be overlooked.

At any rate, the literary context has energetically been restored—a specific understanding of this kind of poetry does justice to the force and the aesthetic pleasure of these dramas—the fascination emanating from them and the audience's identification with it—which, although they have been perceived by many, have not been sufficiently thematized. The ramification is that at best political overtones can be perceived, and more importantly, that morality becomes a repressive counter-authority, which would forestall poetry, if it (along with an ordinary rationality) were to become dominant.

Given that, mainly the choral odes (or many of them) become a problem. (They frequently were and are read almost as the author's voice.) Now, informed commentators have often observed the chorus's detachment from events, its ignorance, its futile hopes, its naïve morality with regard to dramatic action—i.e., that the chorus stands outside of the drama proper⁶⁴—yet the positions represented by it must be taken seriously.

It thus seems essential to differentiate two levels of understanding or reception—which chronologically do not necessarily split up—and to reconstruct different contexts as well: one of identification, the other of distance. Whereas on the first level imaginative involvement and the power of aesthetics fully assert themselves, on the second, if the recipient leaves behind the world of tragedy—which presents itself in necessity, inevitability, and “Unhintergebarkeit,” reflective processing takes place.⁶⁵

specified in the dramas. Since in this context irresistible emotions stand in the foreground, reflective processing has been suspended and becomes a more or less arbitrary matter of the audience.

⁶⁴ This cannot be equated with the assertion that the choral odes represented dispensable fillers, as such observations often are misinterpreted.

⁶⁵ See Liebermann 1974: 7 f., 12, 227, 239 f. (the bias against the “aesthetic tragedy” noticeable there, however, is in need of modification) and 2004: 25 n. 63, 57 f., correspondingly Fitch 2002: 339, who with “retrospect” and “during the play” splits the process into chronological phases (cf. Fitch and McElduff 2002: 37 f.), and Schiesaro 2003: *passim*, especially 221–251; cf. Primavesi 2006: 197 as well. A differentiation of emotional and reflective reaction can be traced back to Aristotle, cf. Seidensticker 2005: 217–245 and on a (not unproblematic) specific point, Lanza 1996: 495 f.

Text-immanent requests to superimpose the second category are not entirely lacking: the analytic moment recorded long ago ranks among them, as well as the categorizing nominal style, which features the embracing and relating typical of these tragedies (“Deutungs- und Verweischarakter”), and the fact that they refer beyond themselves (“represent,” “comment on,” and “*tractare*” have been rightfully emphasized as important characteristics). The descriptive and epic, the depersonalization and fragmentation of characters or rather their reduction to the representation of a role (Fitch 2002: 6f., similarly Fitch and McElduff 2002), all imply a demonstrative gesture and a reflective moment.⁶⁶ If one considers both levels, then the tragedies become “Trainingsstücke” (“exercises”)⁶⁷ in a dual sense: in suffering and doing.

This, however, does not deter us from participating in the world of tragedy, from surrendering to it and letting ourselves be fascinated by it. For the *vitia* (*ambitio*, *luxuria*, *inpotentia*) *scaenam desiderant* (Sen. *epist.* 94.71) and will always find an admiring audience. Just as this audience escapes the world of tragedy (and non-philosophical everyday life), it can turn into a reformed audience (and a reformed public)—but that is another story. One can safely assume, however, that life experience manifests itself in this bipartite response: engagement and distance. The omnipresence of *furor*, *scelus*, and suffering (Braden), of forces that destroy humans (Fitch), and the powerful representation of evil and destructiveness (Gill) turn the Senecan tragedies into the expression of a period (Giardina), the image of life, and the mirror of an age (Boyle). But an image is not a mere depiction of reality. The first step toward distancing lies in the literary (and moreover the mythical) configuration—for the author as well as for the audience.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Nussbaum (in Brunschwig and Nussbaum 1993: 97–149) substantiates a “critical spectatorship” as part of Stoic theory. It should be emphasized that it is possible, even necessary, “to forget the larger, ‘critical’ picture” (Schiesaro 2003: 250). But this cannot be eliminated totally.

⁶⁷ For use of the term, see Liebermann 1974: 9, cf. Schiesaro 2003: 253 (who uses a somewhat different emphasis). Even from the view point of Greek tragedy one can speak of a moment of exercise, even if pleasure and the specific kind of exercise differ; here the contribution by Nuttall 1996: 75–79, is worthwhile.

⁶⁸ Cf. *infra* p. 473. It hardly helps to speak of a society in which myth was a cultural currency, in which myth was translated into reality or reality was interpreted as myth (e.g., Coleman 1990). The famous actualization of the myth in the Roman arena is not comparable (cf. Nuttall 1996: 77), even if Varner (in Harrison 2000a: 119–136) undertakes an equation (as do others) regarding the interaction between myth and reality.

PART THREE

TRAGEDY

Works

HERCULES FURENS

Margarethe Billerbeck

DATE

There is no certain external evidence for dating *Hercules furens*. If we accept the common assumption that Seneca is parodying his own tragedy in the mock *nenia* for the Emperor Claudius (*apocol.* 12.3), the language and motifs of which apparently draw on the dirge from the fourth choral ode (1122–1137), the year AD 54 will be the *terminus ante quem* for its composition.¹ In the relative chronology proposed by Fitch (1981), the Hercules drama forms part of the middle group together with *Troades* and *Medea*.²

CONTENT

The play is set in Thebes. *Prologue* (1–124): in an outburst of jealousy and hatred, Juno gives vent to her mounting frustration. Not only has Hercules emerged victorious from all the labors imposed upon him, but through them he has become a hero and benefactor of mankind and now even stakes his claim to immortality. She resolves on his destruction. The Furies are to drive him mad, and tainted by murder he will long to return to the Underworld from which he will soon emerge.

First Choral Ode (125–204): in an aubade the chorus sings first of the tasks of shepherds and sailors and then describes how the city dwellers fulfill their daily round of duties. Reflecting on the frailty of human life they conclude with a summons “*carpe diem*.”

Second Act (205–523): threatened by the usurper Lycus, old Amphytrion, Megara, and her sons have taken refuge at the altar of Jupiter. The tyrant will

¹ For detailed comparisons, see Mesk 1912, Weinreich 1923: 113 f., and Fitch 1987a: 50–53.

² For a discussion of the relative chronology see further Zwierlein 1983: 233–248 and Nisbet 1990.

at all costs force Megara to marry him and, as part of his strategy, maliciously belittles the heroic deeds of the absent Hercules. As he proceeds with a threat to burn his victims at the stake, a sudden rumble from beneath the earth portends the hero's return from Hades.

Second Choral Ode (524–591): the chorus reflects on the injustice with which an envious Fortuna has pursued the heroic Hercules, who has had to brave every possible danger, while a spineless Eurystheus is allowed to rule in peace. Recalling the great deeds of the hero, they are confident, however, that he will at last return from Hades's realm.

Third Act (592–829): proud to have overcome the lord of the Underworld, Hercules greets the light of day and defies Juno to place another obstacle in his way, which ironically, will be he himself. From Amphitryon he learns of the perils threatening his family and rushes off to kill Lycus. His companion Theseus remains behind to protect the suppliants and treats his listeners to a detailed account of the Cerberus adventure.

Third Choral Ode (830–894): meditating first on death as man's final destiny, the chorus then praises Hercules as the pacifier of the world above and below.

Fourth Act (895–1053): in celebration of his triumph over Lycus, Hercules prepares an offering of thanks. In a sudden fit of madness, however, he slaughters his helpless children and strikes Megara dead, in whom he imagines he sees his hated stepmother. Against his will, Amphitryon survives as Hercules falls to the ground overcome by a numbing sleep.

Fourth Choral Ode (1054–1137): Hercules's atrocious deed provokes general sorrow and grief, with the chorus raising a *nenia* for his dead sons.

Fifth Act (1138–1344): as Hercules awakes from his profound sleep, he tries to find his way back to reality. From Amphitryon and Theseus he learns that Juno's vengeance has made him the slaughterer of his own family. In a passionate outburst of helplessness he resolves on suicide. In the end, only decrepit old Amphitryon can stop him, with an appeal to his own frailty. Finally, Hercules recovers himself and, resolving to live on, he follows his faithful friend Theseus to Athens.

SOURCE

While the story of Hercules's madness can be traced back to the cyclic *Kypria*, it was in fact the *Herakles* of Euripides that gave the myth its canonical form. The play evidently remained popular and maintained its place in Hellenistic theater.³ In Seneca's own lifetime the stage-struck Emperor Nero acted the part of the mad hero (Suet. *Nero* 21.3; Cass. Dio 63.9.4).

SENECA AND HIS EURIPIDEAN MODEL

One of the main problems that has occupied research on *Hercules furens* is the question of its model. That Seneca bases the plot of his tragedy on the *Herakles* of Euripides can be clearly seen from a synopsis of the two plays (Miller 1917: 526–537); opinions are divided, however, on the degree to which the Euripidean model has influenced Seneca's tragedy. In modern times Friedrich Leo was the first to maintain that Seneca merely followed the Attic tragedy ("argumenta"); nevertheless, he pointed out numerous examples in which the Roman was quite capable of drawing more closely on his Greek model (Leo 1878: 147 and 160–183). In his influential article on the development of Greek drama in the Hellenistic period and its influence on the Roman playwrights, Tarrant regards the direct influence as minimal: "fifth-century Attic tragedy was in many cases a remote and not a proximate source for Seneca," for it simply provided him with "mythic plots and the basic structure" (Tarrant 1978: 214 f.). Zintzen, whose detailed critical analysis remains important for the discussion, examines how the Roman philosopher in his notion of the figure of Herakles changes or reinterprets his model: "wie der römische Philosoph im Blick auf seine Konzeption der Heraklesgestalt die Vorlage veränderte oder uminterpretierte" (Zintzen 1972: 157).

In the conception of his drama Seneca changes Euripides's plot and structure in several respects. For the Iris-Lyssa scene (815–874), for example, which marks the beginning of the hero's madness, he substitutes Juno's prologue (1–124) with its summons to the Furies to derange Hercules. Consequently, the Euripidean speech by the messenger, reporting on the murderous madness of Herakles (922–1015), is transformed into an on-scene description of the carnage by Amphytrion, who alone is spared (991–1034).⁴

³ For a summary of the testimony for the myth, see Billerbeck 1999: 1–10.

⁴ The passages in *Herc. f.* relevant to the staging of the drama have been collected anew by Eisgrub 2004.

Out of the brief dialogue concerning the whereabouts of Kerberos, which Euripides assigns to the father and his homecoming son (610–621), Seneca develops a long ekphrasis describing Hercules's descent to the Underworld (662–829). The new motif of Lycus's marriage proposal is introduced to characterize him as a *homo novus*. Besides these obvious changes there are smaller deviations from Euripides, especially in the choral odes. There are nevertheless clear echoes of the train of thought as well as of the actual expressions of the Greek model.⁵

The old hypothesis that these changes owe something to Accius's *Amphitruo* as a Roman intermediary remains disputed.⁶ Important for judging Seneca's relation to Euripides is a proper understanding of *imitatio* and *variatio*. The modification of the model and innovation, especially in the characterization of persons, corresponds to the prevailing taste of the times. Moreover, Seneca's preoccupation with the depiction of strong emotion—hate in the case of Juno, anger and grief in that of Hercules—his tendency to rhetorical elaboration, for example, in the ekphrasis of the Underworld,⁷ and his obvious pleasure in repartee, e.g., in the dialogue between Amphitryon and Lycus, have all been factors in the deviations from the Euripidean play. The importance of the Roman Hercules as a Stoic role model further explains why Seneca has made him the dominant figure of his drama.

A further problem in Senecan studies is how to interpret this new figure of Hercules. In antiquity the depiction of Hercules as the strong man lent itself to comedy and burlesque, for example, in the *Apocolocyntosis*, as earlier in Euripides's *Alkestis* and Callimachus's *Hymn to Artemis*. But these characteristics could also be developed into the figure of a tragic hero or given a didactic and ethical interpretation.⁸ In Euripides's *Herakles* the hero who has successfully completed the labors imposed upon him by Eurystheus is depicted as a benefactor and friend of mankind. Through Hera's revenge for Zeus's adultery with Alkmene he becomes the victim of divine arbitrariness and, consequently, guilty of the death of his own family. This tragic experience brings him down from the heroic to the human level. For the philosophical tradition of the Herakles figure, the fable of "Herakles at the crossroads," ascribed to the Sophist Prodikos (Xen. *mem.* 2.1.21–34), occupies a central

⁵ These are listed together with references to earlier studies by Billerbeck 1999: 17–22.

⁶ In more recent times this hypothesis has been maintained especially by Friedrich 1934; for a detailed discussion of the Accius fragments, see Dingel 1985: 1074–1076 and Dangel 1995: 370–372.

⁷ For a survey of the use of ekphrasis in the Senecan tragedies, see Aygon 2004, esp. 375–382.

⁸ For the transformations of the Herakles figure from antiquity to modern times, see Galinsky 1972.

place. In it the hero spurns the easy path of pleasure and chooses the more difficult one of virtue; through the conquest of evil he seeks his way to happiness. This ascetic portrayal of Herakles, as it was developed especially by the Cynics, found its place in Stoic ethics; Hercules was for the philosopher Seneca a model of the *vir sapiens* (cf., e.g., *dial.* 2.2.1; 9.16.4). Augustus, like Hellenistic rulers before him, gladly saw himself in the role of *victor* and *pacator mundi* for whom immortality would be the ultimate reward. In what way Seneca combined the image of Hercules, developed on the one hand in Roman political propaganda and on the other as the role model it assumed in the *interpretatio Stoica*, with its poetic portrayal in Euripides's tragedy remains a matter of dispute.

Opinions on the interpretation of Seneca's tragedy diverge radically: is madness externally imposed on the hero as in Euripides, where it is caused by Lyssa carrying out Hera's revenge, an apparent counterpart of which is found in the prologue where Juno summons the Furies to drive Hercules mad? Or is the *furor* of the hero, whose deeds characterize him as a man of violence, the result of his overestimating himself, of *hybris*? This latter, psychological interpretation of the play places it in relation to Seneca's treatise *De ira*, in which the philosopher demonstrates how an outburst of anger can end in *insania*. Lessing already recognized the possibility of transforming the Euripidean tragedy into a psychological drama.⁹

The modern psychological interpretation of *Hercules furens*, which has been championed in more recent studies especially by Zintzen (1972), Wellmann-Bretzigheimer (1978), and Fitch (1987a), first gained currency through von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1895: 2.128 f.), who, however, later retracted his interpretation. Whatever may have induced Seneca to substitute the prologue for the scene with Lyssa, Juno is no less responsible for the hero's madness than is Hera in the Euripidean version of the myth.

In recent Senecan studies, Heldmann (1974: 21–56) and Zwierlein (1984: 12–21), in particular, have called attention to the clear correspondences between the prologue and Euripides's scene of madness: Juno summons the Furies from the Underworld to hound Hercules (86–106); they should, however, attack him only after he has returned victorious over death and Hades (112–115). Consequently, Hercules's madness begins just when he reflects with great satisfaction on his deeds. The goddess prophesies that he will in the end wish to die (116 f.). In fact, as Hercules comes to recognize that he has destroyed his family, he wishes nothing more than to return to

⁹ The corresponding text is reprinted in Barner 1973: 129 f.

the Underworld (1218). Amphitryon, however, rightly surmises (1201) that it was Juno who was actually aiming Hercules's arrows (118–121) in the carnage. Thus, those who would ascribe Hercules's madness to hybris alone fail to recognize the function of the prologue as well as the deeply rooted motif of the goddess's revenge.

The figure of Juno *noverca* had been given a permanent place in Latin literature by Virgil (e.g., *Aen.* 1.37–49, 7.293–322) and Ovid (e.g., *met.* 2.512–530, 4.422–431); likewise Hercules's descent from Jupiter and his claim to immortality are an integral part of the myth. In the dramatic tension of the play, it is entirely consistent if Juno interprets as megalomania and arrogance those qualities that Megara and Amphitryon praise as virtues.¹⁰ The misguided judgment of Hercules's "brutality [...], lack of affection for his family, his arrogance towards the gods, and his hybris" (Fitch 1979: 240) can be seen above all as a reaction to the exaggerated interpretation that claimed the drama as a "Hymnus auf den stoischen Weisen" (Edert 1907: 29–33 and 58f.). *Hercules furens* is not, however, a didactic treatise formulated in specifically Stoic philosophical terminology even if many ideas of popular philosophy are to be found in it, notably in the choral odes, the concept of envious Fortuna, for example, or the admonition to seek *mediocritas*.¹¹ The leitmotif of Hercules as the strong man who makes the dangers he encounters a test of virtue corresponds to traditional Roman values. Similarly, the figure of the *victor* and *pacator mundi* is very much in harmony with imperial propaganda since Augustus.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

The judgment of the "tragoedia rhetorica" (Leo 1878: 148), the stage figures of which possess no character (ethos) but merely passions (pathos), has given way to a more differentiated assessment of the style of the Senecan tragedies since the influential study by Regenbogen (1927–1928). The abiding influence of the rhetorical training of the schools on the language of Latin poetry

¹⁰ The various interpretations of Hercules's madness are listed by Schmitz (1993: 127–134); see also Papadopoulou 2004, who considers the violent side of the hero that was already emphasized in the Euripidean tragedy. This unconvincing line of argumentation claims that Hercules's acts of violence have a clear resemblance to those of Lycus. More useful for judging the problem in the context of literary history is the discussion by Watson (1995: 239–243), who traces the revenge motif in the ancient representation of Juno as stepmother.

¹¹ The interpretation of the Senecan tragedies as didactic dramas and "philosophical propaganda-plays" was maintained especially by Egermann 1940 and Marti 1945 and 1947.

is nevertheless evident since Ovid, at the latest.¹² A good example of the influence of declamation in *Hercules furens* is the double altercation between Lycus and Megara (358–437) on the one hand, and Lycus and Amphitryon (438–494) on the other. Not only is the battle of words carried on in part in stichomythia, but the key words picked up by the interlocutor (e.g., *famulus*: 430/1; *virtus*: 433, *virtutem*: 434, *virtutis*: 435) also encapsulate the parts of the dialogue and add force and point to the retort.¹³ Besides antithesis, the chief characteristics of Seneca's style are intensification and fullness of expression (*abundantia*). Recent studies on style have shown that the latter is found in diverse forms (e.g., repetition or variation of a word, elaboration of a concept in its different aspects, and polar expression) and is as much a part of Seneca's poetic register as is his striving for syntactical conciseness (e.g., in constructions with the ablative). In particular, where these features appear in the narrative passages, editors have too often failed to recognize their function and deleted them as interpolations.

In his poetic vocabulary Seneca closely follows his Augustan models: Virgil (*Aeneid*), Horace (*Odes*, especially in the choral odes), and Ovid (*Metamorphoses*), with the necessary adaptation of the meters (principally hexameter to iambic trimeter and anapaests). Like his predecessors, Seneca displays a distinct preference for words formed with the suffixes *-fer* and *-ger*, a predilection shared by his successors Lucan, Statius, and Silius.¹⁴ Among the numerous motifs that Seneca borrowed from the Augustan poets, Theseus's long description of the descent into the Underworld in the third act has a special place. Structurally, the ekphrasis spans the time it takes Hercules to kill the tyrant in his palace. As the narrative develops independently of the action going on, however, it assumes in its own right the form of a rhetorically elaborated set piece. As a model Seneca takes the description of the Underworld in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*; for the details, however, he draws on numerous other poets and heightens the gruesome and uncanny aspects through the use of *variatio*. Similarly, an element of rhetorical exaggeration can be seen in the turn to a cosmic dimension, which is well suited to the theme of the hero striving for heaven.¹⁵

¹² On Seneca's use of rhetorical figures of style, the study by Canter (1925) remains basic.

¹³ See Seidensticker 1969: esp. 38–45.

¹⁴ Previously, a comprehensive analysis of Seneca's poetic language was lacking; recent studies on his language and style by Jakobi (1988), Billerbeck (1988), and Hillen (1989) appeared almost simultaneously, however, and have now found their place in the newer commentaries on the Senecan tragedies.

¹⁵ The cosmic dimension of the dramatic action in Seneca's tragedies has been studied especially by Schmitz 1993.

TRANSMISSION

In the corpus of the Senecan tragedies, which is transmitted in ca. 400 manuscripts, *Hercules furens* stands first. The text has been transmitted in two distinct branches, E and A. The oldest manuscript and sole representative of the uncontaminated E-class, the so-called “Etruscus” (Laur. Plut. 37.13) from the eleventh century, stands counter to the six pure descendants of the A-class, which in turn fall into two subclasses δ (PTG) and β (CSV). Although the two main classes E and A had certainly divided sometime before 1200, the orthographic mistakes in both traditions, identifiable as confusions in majuscule script, suggest a division in the first stage of transmission (ϵ and α already in late antiquity). Toward the end of the thirteenth century, both branches of the text came into contact. Presumably it was in the circle of the Paduan pre-humanists Lovato Lovati (1241–1309) and Albertino Mussato (1261–1329) that the “Etruscus” was discovered and compared with the A-tradition of the text, which was already known. From the two branches, a mixed text Σ (FMN) of the tragedies was produced. Contamination also took place in the reverse direction: in the A-tradition the codex K (ca. 1300), written in a French hand, supplied verses from E, which were missing in α (e.g., 19b–21a, 83–89, 543). The lively philological activity in the ensuing years led to the establishment of a vulgate text (μ), which then, together with the commentary published by the English Dominican Nicholas Trevet in 1317, set the stage for the wide dissemination of the corpus of tragedies south of the Alps, along with the intensive study of it by the Italian humanists. Subsequently, the “Etruscus” disappeared until it was rediscovered in Florence by Jan Frederik Gronovius, in the winter of 1640–1641, to serve as the starting point for the first critical edition of all the plays (1661).¹⁶

RECEPTION

Individual motifs, such as the description of the Underworld in the ekphrasis of Theseus, with its heightened effect of the uncanny and gruesome, were taken up by the epic poets of the Flavian era Statius (*Theb.* 4.406–548) and Silius (13.523–612).¹⁷ Claudian (21.143–147 and *rapt. Pros.* 2 pr. 45–48), too, was later to make use of the rhetorically exaggerated notion of Hercules as a better

¹⁶ Zwierlein (1983) is fundamental for the text tradition of the Senecan tragedies; for *Hercules furens*, see Billerbeck 1999: 39–89, summarized in Billerbeck and Guex 2002: 30–32.

¹⁷ On which, see Billerbeck 1983.

Atlas. The reminiscences of the play in the Orpheus and Eurydice episode of the second choral ode (569–589) in Boethius's *Consolatio* (3 carm. 12) are almost a cento. As a play, however, *Hercules furens* of Seneca had relatively little direct influence on modern theater.¹⁸

OUTLOOK

Most recent research on the Senecan tragedies has been directed increasingly toward their study by the Italian humanists.¹⁹ The beginnings, as already mentioned, are to be found in the study and criticism of the text by the Paduan circle around Lovato Lovati and Albertino Mussato as well as in the commentaries on the tragedies by Nicholas Trevet. From the middle of the fourteenth century, a lively interest in the study of the dramas spread to Bologna and other humanistic centers, which took the form both of commentaries on individual plays and of their interpretation as a whole.²⁰ The most prominent result of the interest in *Hercules furens* is to be found in Coluccio Salutati's allegorical interpretation of the play in his famous letter to Johannes de Senis (1371) and especially in his work *De laboribus Herculis*.²¹

¹⁸ See Reid 1993: 530–531 for a short list; see also Jacquot 1964 [1973] and Lefèvre 1978b.

¹⁹ A survey with examples can be found in Marchitelli 1999 and 2000.

²⁰ Iohannes de Segarellis's commentary on *Herc. f.* (ca. 1400) has been edited and discussed in detail for the first time by Hafemann 2003.

²¹ For an edition of the *De laboribus Herculis*, see Ullman 1951.

TROAS

Wilfried Stroh

Seneca named two of his tragedies after cities and not, as customary, after persons: *Thebais* and *Troas*. In both cases, the title is transmitted only by manuscripts of the A-group, while the Etruscus (E) gives a title that corresponds to the title of a Euripidean drama: *Phoenissae* and *Troades*. That the title *Phoenissae* is not Seneca's is evident from the *dramatis personae*, in which no chorus of Phoenician slaves appears. In the case of the *Troas* the title *Troades* would not be entirely unsuitable, but since the Excerpta Thuanea, which belong to the same tradition as the Etruscus,¹ also give the title as *Troas* this has to count as the reading of the archetype and hence as the received title.²

The title, "Poem on Troy", is in keeping with the contents of the drama,³ in which the city, still burning and smoking (these fumes are ever present in the piece: 889, 900, 1053 f., cf. also 392 f.), is addressed on the morning after the destruction almost as a *dramatis persona* (1–4, Hecuba): *Quicumque regno fidit [...] nec leues metuit deos [...], me uideat et te, Troia [...]*. The characters are outside the city⁴—thus forming another parallel with *Thebais*, where the action also takes place outside Thebes, in contrast to the usual situation in tragedies where the setting is the palace façade.

One of the main ideas of the piece is that Troy, the "title role", is not, as Hecuba believes at the beginning, already totally destroyed (14) and only awaiting burial (65); on the contrary, the truth is correctly stated by

¹ Cf. stemma in Otto Zwierlein's edition (p. xviii) and Zwierlein 1983: 15 ff., esp. 19.

² Stroh 1994: 251 n. 23 (= 2008: 200 n. 14); in agreement with this are Harrison (2000a: p. X) and Volk (2000: 197 with note 3). The traditional view, without explanation, is in Keulen 2001: 14.

³ Important aids to comprehension are the two independent commentaries of Caviglia 1981 and esp. Fantham 1982; Keulen 2001 is important on account of the material and should be taken with Amoroso 1984 and Boyle 1994. *Troas* is the object of a number of studies in the otherwise uneven collection of Harrison 2000a. Among older studies, attention should be given to Steidle 1941, Schetter 1965, Steidle 1968, Calder 1970, Lawall 1982, Wilson 1983, Dingel 1985: 1087–1094, Motto and Clark 1988: 215–259, Vielberg 1994, Boyle 1997: 67–84, and Heil 2013: 123–162; additional literature is available in Stok 1999 and Malaspina 2005a (accessible via the index).

⁴ On the importance of the stage setting here, cf. Schmidt 2001, 344 f., cf. also 350 f.

Andromacha (428): *nondum ruentis Ilii fatum stetit* (cf. 454 f.). The ghost-like heroes of the Trojan war continue to exert influence beyond their graves and demand new and more dreadful victims. Achilles the Greek desires bloody marriage with Polyxena, daughter of Priam (cf. esp. *adhuc Achilles uiuit* [...]: 955): this is the case in Acts II, IV, and V; more than anything else, fear of the Trojan Hector (esp. 529 ff.) moves the Greeks to cast down from the tower his little son Astyanax, the potential avenger of his father, *futurus Hector* (551): this is the case in Acts III and V—two shocking murders of innocent children. Not before this double deed of awful violence has been accomplished can it be claimed (1168, Hecuba): *bellum peractum est*.

It is very probable that Seneca found the combination of precisely these two plots—Polyxena and Astyanax—in none of the Greek tragedians. Polyxena appeared in Sophocles's (now lost) drama of that name and Euripides portrayed her in the first part of *Hekabe*; the fate of Astyanax makes up about one-third of the surviving *Troades* of Euripides and it was the main subject of the Roman dramatist's Accius tragedy *Astyanax*—a play known to Seneca and from which he took over one motif, the hiding place of Astyanax.⁵ However, for the concept of his drama as such he is indebted to Ovid, who in his 13th book of the *Metamorphoses* only touches on the destruction of Troy but goes into detail on the deaths of Astyanax and, in particular, of Polyxena (408–575). In this passage of Ovid's, Seneca discovered the idea that Achilles remained the enemy of Troy even after his death (499–507⁶); here he found those thoughts that recur rondo-like throughout his tragedy (*met.* 13.464): that the living are more to be bewailed than the dead (*Tro.* 142–163; 576 f., 945–948, 967–971; 1171–1174). Longing for death, fear of death, and the vanquishing of this fear are the recurring themes of the tragedy (this, too, in contrast to the *Troades* of Euripides⁷). Two symbols of death and transitoriness, the walls of the ruined Troy and Hector's grave, are constantly visible on stage.

⁵ Fantham 1982: 64–66; Fantham (pp. 50–78) provides a useful review of the history of the legend and Seneca's sources.

⁶ It was precisely this passage that Seneca's father had quoted in detail and discussed (contr. 9.15, 17). On the imitation of Ovid throughout the drama, cf. Jakobi 1988: 18–41, who however only notes isolated parallels.

⁷ These themes, however, harmonise with the prose works of Seneca; cf. esp. Leeman 1971; relevant passages cited by Motto 1970: 59–62 (s.v. "Death"). For the motif of death in the *Troas*, cf. the commentary by Fantham 1982 and particularly the studies by Lawall 1982, Motto and Clark 1988: 215 ff. and Shelton 2000.

Hecuba, who is to become the *mater dolorosa* of the piece, opens the prologue and Act I with a speech on the transitoriness of the happiness of rulers, which displays almost philosophical detachment—no wonder, for she has foreseen the fall of Troy since the birth of Paris (28–37) and, as she remarks in a tone of self-irony, has even brought it about herself. Only when she speaks of the murder of her husband Priam (44–56) does her tone become slightly more passionate.

The Trojan women whom she now urges to lament (*lamenta cessant?*: 63) must already be on stage. Either they have been there from the start or have gradually taken their positions in the course of the prologue.⁸ Like her previous speech, Hecuba's lament, rehearsed and presented with the chorus—an anapaestic *kommos* (*planctus*: 64, 79, 93, 130)—is by no means a spontaneous cry of pain, but a ritual “dirge” (*lugere*: 68, 82, *luctus*: 97), as is fitting for a chorus that has experienced ten years of suffering and lamentation (67–78; cf. 97) and in which the mood has, as it were, to be induced step by step. The beginning of the real *planctus* (i.e., the ode accompanying the “beating” of the breasts [106, 114, cf. 120 f.], head, arms, and shoulders [117–119]) does not occur until line 117; the women prepare for this by unbinding their hair and baring their arms and breasts (87 ff.). Fifty anapaests are required for the *planctus* (117–141), then, at Hecuba's command, the song is changed: Priam, until now the object of lament, should rather be considered blessed, since he has been spared the humiliation of a Greek triumphal procession (!) and may abide with Hector in Elysium (142–163). Exalted in ecstatic visions of the other world, the chorus and Hecuba move off as if the tragedy were already at an end. But it is only the beginning.

As is correctly noted in the A-tradition (before line 164: *Taltibius chorus grecorum*), Talthybius, accompanied by a group of Greek soldiers, enters the now empty stage;⁹ they will be witnesses to the dispute between Pyrrhus and

⁸ The latter option was adopted in the Munich performance of 1993 (partial documentation in Stroh 1994 and 2008, cf. Vogt, Stroh and Trautmann 1993). The results of this production with regard to stage action have been fully incorporated into the present study. The idea of Seneca's *Troas* as a piece conceived for the stage is winning increasing acceptance. The latest objections, circumspectly raised by Fantham 2000, will probably not convince many. Cf. esp. the essays by Schmidt 2000, 2001, 2004a, 2004b and pp. 531–546 of the present volume. Theatrical performances of the *Troas* and Seneca's other tragedies from 1993 on have been registered at www.klassphil.uni-muenchen.de/~stroh/seneca_scaenicus.htm (a shortened version is available in the appendix to Stroh 2008: 216–220).

⁹ It is unnecessary to assume a change of location here, provided one does not (as some commentators do) imagine the Trojan women to be held in a kind of prison camp to which the Greeks have no access. On the unity of location in the drama as a whole, cf. Schmidt 2001:

Agamemnon (337) and will naturally sing the second choral ode.¹⁰ The whole of the second act of the drama (whose title N.B. is not *Troades*) is dominated, in calculated contrast to the first act, by men and and by Greeks. The view generally held until recently that the chorus of Trojan women is present during Talthybius's report and then sings the second choral ode leads to hopeless contradictions. Both Act III and Act IV, for example, rest on the assumption that the Trojan women know nothing about the planned executions.

At any rate, the ghost of the wrathful Achilles, which gives the initial impulse to the plot, is not actually shown on stage (although it may have been in Sophocles's *Polyxena*); it is only described in Talthybius's messenger speech. Seneca's aim was probably to leave some room for doubt about the actual truth of this fantastical (169) narrative, which is delivered with all the refinements of horror (168).¹¹ It is in keeping with this that Pyrrhus and Agamemnon, who clearly do not make their appearance until after the messenger speech, make no reference to this miracle in the course of their dispute about whether Polyxena should be sacrificed.¹² Notably, Pyrrhus does not justify himself by referring to any such explicitly formulated wish of his father and mentions only his splendid deeds (209 ff.). What leads him to demand Polyxena at all is only hinted at (cf. 195 and 246): it may be that before line 203 the beginning of Pyrrhus and Agamemnon's conversation (very abrupt as it now stands) dropped out of the tradition.

Achilles's son—choleric and touchy about his honor—and Agamemnon—initially a model of statesman-like reasonableness—engage in a dispute, at first in the form of a rhetorical *agon* (203–291), then developing in intensity into stichomythia (292–348); in no way does the dispute follow a purely argumentative course.¹³ First, Pyrrhus's rhetorically bungled demand, tactless as it is and even insulting, breaks down in the face of Agamemnon's

345 with the reference to Vogt, Stroh and Trautmann 1993: 76 f.; for a different view, cf. most recently Marshall 2000, Heil 2013: 128, 131 f.

¹⁰ Stroh 1994: 261 (= 2008: 213); subsequently also Keulen 2001: 268 (with additional arguments) and Heil 2013: 130–133, 153–159.

¹¹ For a different view cf. esp. Dingel 1974: 92–94; according to Dingel the objective truth of this manifestation is meant to refute the rational philosophy of the second choral ode.

¹² Cf. Schmidt 2004b: 343 f. and Heil 2013: 136: "Die Erscheinung Achills, von der Talthybius berichtet, und der Streit von Pyrrhus und Agamemnon sind voneinander unabhängige Reaktionen auf ein und dasselbe Ereignis. Dieses Ereignis, die Verlosung der trojanischen Frauen, ist selbst zwar nicht Teil der Bühnenaktion, beherrscht aber [...] den Schluß der Rede Hecubas". Agamemnon's argument that Achilles would actually be vilified as a result of such a sacrifice (293–300) would be meaningless if Achilles himself had unambiguously demanded this show of honor.

¹³ Cf. Stroh 1994: 256 f. (= 2008: 205 f.); slightly different: Littlewood 2004: 91 f.

noble principles (250–291, 293–300).¹⁴ Pyrrhus reacts to this with an outbreak of anger that drives him to threaten violence (cf. gesture at 306!) and even regicide (306–310). Faced with this intimidation Agamemnon suddenly loses his composure and resorts to irritated irony (310–313; 318–321) and insinuations (325 f.). When Pyrrhus then adds to his threat of violence an almost open incitement to rebellion (337 f.), the commander-in-chief sinks to the level of undignified denigration of his opponent, making particular reference to his illegitimate origins (342 f.). Pyrrhus now has only to hint a third time at violence and perhaps unsheathe his sword (*comminus*: 348) for Agamemnon to back down completely. With a boastful remark to the effect that, were it not for his desire to maintain his customary humanity (350 f.), he could easily teach Pyrrhus some proper respect, he delegates the whole affair to Calchas.

This means that Agamemnon, waiving his original, clear decision, has now reconciled himself inwardly to the sacrifice; indeed he actually suggests a positive decision to Calchas by spontaneously recalling the earlier sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis.¹⁵ Calchas, who as a priest is, as it were, professionally committed to matters of sacrifice, sees himself encouraged to demand yet another sacrifice on the basis of some nebulous *fata*,¹⁶ i.e., purely on the basis of his authority as a priest: Hector's son is to be thrown down from Priam's tower. Only after this has been accomplished can the journey home take place.

The awkward atmosphere created by this priestly death sentence is taken up in the following choral ode by the Greek soldiers (371–408: in stichic Asclepiads), one of the most fascinating pieces of ancient contemplative poetry.¹⁷ Is it then true, as myth (*fabula*) suggests, that after death a shadow

¹⁴ Agamemnon here represents Seneca's own views as Anliker (1960: 65–67) rightly understands; cf. Malaspina 2004: 275 f. and 287 f. Other assessments of Agamemnon are summarised by Keulen 2001: 17.

¹⁵ Unlike the present situation, the position at Aulis was a genuine emergency since the Greeks were prevented from continuing their voyage by the calm sent by the gods. Quite implausibly some have suggested a comparable calm for Seneca's *Troas* (Schetter 1965: 234, Steidle 1968: 60, Fantham 1982: 233, 239 etc., Dingel 1985: 1088), attempting to see a reference to this in lines 191 ff. and 199 ff.; justifiable disagreement in Schmitz 1993: 184–190.

¹⁶ It would be to some extent consistent with conventional religious beliefs that an enraged deity (as for example Artemis at Aulis) should demand a human sacrifice. When Calchas attributes such a demand to *fata*, he is mixing an archaic concept of Moira with Vergil's notion of *fatum*, which may also make demands on human beings. This has nothing to do with the stoic *fatum* (cf. Keulen 2001 on line 352 for a different view, together with the deceptive reference to the note on line 124).

¹⁷ Even Hamlet's famous soliloquy may have been inspired by this passage (Miola 1992: 38 f.).

of the human being lives on (370 f.) and thus draws out the misery of his existence (377)? Or is man allowed to die wholly, having drawn his final breath (378–381)? The chorus ponders the question and tends to see the solution in the second alternative. This, we will remember, is Epicure's answer—not that the chorus explicitly adopts that philosopher's argumentation, based as it is on a developed form of materialism or atomism. Seneca, avoiding anachronism, lets these Pre-presocratics operate with the generally observed law of mortality (382–390):¹⁸ Just as everything in the world comes to an end, so the soul together with the body will cease to exist (401 f.). After death is the same as before birth (407 f.).

This ode, in which Seneca very clearly pays tribute to the Greeks as the inventors of philosophy (though the view expressed is not necessarily quite his own),¹⁹ cannot be understood as a reaction to the alleged apparition of Achilles nor, indeed, is any reference made to the previously announced fate of the young victims-to-be.²⁰ But it is nonetheless closely linked to the main theme of the drama—the fear of death and the vanquishing of this fear. Fear of death can, with the help of simple reflections, be overcome—even by the ordinary man.

It is fear that drives Agamemnon to yield to Pyrrhus; fear that is spread by the priest's pronouncement (592); and fear from which the chorus in the second ode attempts to free itself; in short, fear (*timor*, *metus*)—from Talthybius's first report in the second act to Ulixes's terror-trick in the third (164–704), i.e., over half the drama—fear is the all-pervading emotion. Andromacha, Hector's widow, who makes her appearance in the third act (and will presumably remain on stage until the end of the piece), presents a sharp contrast to her loudly wailing attendants (409–411); she remains quite unfeeling except for the one remaining surge of fear (423, 425, 426, 431), which

¹⁸ For this reason alone it can hardly be correct when Fantham 1982: 85 (cf. 262 f. and Fantham 2000: 18; similarly Littlewood 2004: 94 f.) believes that in this choral ode the philosopher Seneca is speaking in his own voice, free of any close reference to the plot. On the relationship of the ode to Seneca's prose works: Marino 1996b.

¹⁹ Cf. the literature listed in note 7 *supra*.

²⁰ Interpretations along these lines are presented by Keulen 2001: 268–270; cf. also Dingel 1974 (as *supra* in note 12). An obvious connection with the preceding situation would be Lucretius's comment after his indignant description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia: It is fear concerning the soul's fate after death which causes humans to become the victims of religion and its representatives; if people *knew* that death puts a definite end to their woes *aliqua ratione ualerent / religionibus atque minis obsistere uatum* (1.108 f.). This, however is not formulated by Seneca. Incidentally, with regard to his description of the Calchas scene, I have no doubt that Seneca, who wrote *De superstitione* in the spirit of enlightenment, felt much the same as Lucretius: *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* (1.101).

is roused on account of her little son Astyanax. In close correspondence with the doctrine of Stoic psychology, this fear is nourished by the hope with which it is linked (*spes*: 462);²¹ Andromacha, a hero's widow and a hero's mother par excellence, sees in the little Astyanax at her side both the image of her own Hector (464–468), who is still of greater importance to her than her son (459), and the future avenger of Troy, to which great end she is presently training him (470–474). Thus at the dream appearance of her husband (438–460), who entreats her to save their son, she is panic-stricken (457 f.). The very presence of Hector's tomb on the stage, in which she plans to conceal Astyanax, fills her with dread (487 f.); this dread is now transmitted to her little son (503 f.), which she grotesquely misinterprets as a clear sign of heroic descent (504 f.),²² for young heroes, after all, must be free of fear.

Even Ulixes, Andromacha's opponent—perhaps in part a self-portrait of the statesman Seneca, who was himself hemmed in by so many constraints²³—is not without fear. When he enters hesitantly (522 f.), it is not because he is hatching plots (523), but because he is suffering from the ambivalence of his own feelings. On the one hand, his allotted task of taking a child from its mother is painful to him (cf. esp. 736); on the other hand, fear concerning the future of Greece (529 ff., cf. 737 ff.) and of his own son (593) presses him to carry out the unavoidable instruction: should the son of Hector remain alive, the Greeks would never be able to feel safe. (The authority of the priest, however, leaves Ulixes fairly cold: 532 f., 592 f.) Seneca has made it unmistakably clear that this fear is objectively justified: given the opportunity, Andromacha would train her son to be the avenger of Troy; he would then be destined one day to drag Pyrrhus, Achilles's son, and so win posthumous satisfaction for his father (774).

The central section of the third act in which Andromacha and Ulixes confront one another has long been considered a masterpiece of dramatic art.²⁴ In a reversal of expectations the “wily” Ulixes openly states his intentions

²¹ Sen. *epist.* 5.7–9 (following the Stoic Hekaton): similar thoughts in Horace in the Stoic epistles 1.6.9–11 and 1.16.65.

²² On the disturbed communication between mother and child cf. Stroh 1994: 258 f. (= 2008: 208 f.).

²³ I refer here to his reaction to the murders of Britannicus and Agrippina, the one alleged, the other undeniable. Föllinger 2005 gives the different view that in the person of Ulixes Seneca wanted to demonstrate “the moral worthlessness of tyranny” (p. 113); but consider just lines 762–765. Ulixes is always as humane as his mission allows.

²⁴ As early as 1874 Klein (generally contemptuous of Seneca) proclaims this act to be “in its pathos one of the most powerful, in its dramatic quality one of the most magnificent pieces

and reasons (524–555), while Andromacha tries to be cunning: Oh, if she only knew where her son was! Her exaggerated grief over the son who has died at an unknown spot (556–567) and the superfluous heroic pathos with which she claims as *animosa mater* to be ready to undergo any type of torture (582–588) indicate clearly to Ulixes that this woman is simulating (568–570, cf. 589 ff.). After a pause, however, her second improvised version, according to which Astyanax perished at the fall of Troy and is now “lying among the dead” (603), does finally (accompanied by an oath) make an impression. Ulixes is already preparing to carry the good news to his countrymen (605 f.) when, pausing²⁵ and giving the matter calm consideration, he realizes, in a monologue (607–618), that Andromacha, whom he has been observing closely, may well be deceiving him even now. Her fear, which in her gestures she cannot keep concealed (616 f.), becomes her downfall (618): *magis haec timet quam maeret*.

Now Ulixes becomes “the genuine Ulixes” (614), the man of cunning whom we have long been waiting for; above all, the master of highly refined psycho-terror. First he shocks Andromacha by describing to her in a hypocritical show of congratulation the manner of death planned for Astyanax (619–622); she faints, again revealing her maternal fear (623–625). To augment this fear but also, more importantly, to win some clue from Andromacha’s reaction as to Astyanax’ hiding place he immediately feigns a search and sends his soldiers off to this purpose (627–631). Finally he has a brainwave: if Astyanax is really and truly dead, then Calchas’s orders are that the tomb of Hector must be destroyed (634–641).²⁶ HIS tomb! Andromacha, a prey now to a double fear—for Astyanax *and* for Hector—delivers a grotesque monologue of decision (642–662). Although the desecration of Hector’s tomb must bring with it the discovery and death of Astyanax, she still thinks she is in a position to decide between son and husband; finally she decides in favor of Astyanax—not on the basis of a mother’s love but from a need for revenge (662): *serua e duobus, anime, quem Danai timent*.

in the heritage of classical tragedy as a whole” (p. 386), ranking it even higher than similar passages in Shakespeare. The central scene of *Phaedra* (Phaedra—Hippolytus) and the final act of *Thyestes* are comparable in dramatic power and similar with respect to the character of the “revelation scene.”

²⁵ Useful comments on the stage-action of this scene are found in Schmidt 2000: 401–403, 421–423.

²⁶ On the basis of Seneca’s text it is impossible to be certain if Ulixes pretends this intention because he already knows from Andromacha’s darting looks (*quid respicis* [...]?: 631) that Astyanax is hidden in Hector’s tomb, or if he only wants to shock her with this plan of desecrating the tomb. The former possibility is the more probable.

But Andromacha, the victim of her emotions, cannot uphold even this illusory decision. When Ulixes looks like he is really going to attack the tomb (663 ff.), she is suddenly once more obsessed by the idea (673–676) that she must defend Hector and announces that she intends using force to protect the tomb (671–677). With a cry recalling Leonore's "Kill first his wife!"—*me me sternite hic ferro prius* (680)—Andromacha throws herself in the path of the approaching soldiers—but in vain: *repellor; heu me* (681). All that remains to her, powerless as she is, is the wild hope, fast becoming a hallucination, that the dead Hector will protect his tomb himself (681–685). Only the actual attack on the tomb brings her back to her senses. All at once she realizes that Astyanax's fate is sealed, even if she abandons Hector (686–691).

Immediately, she is once more the skillful tactician who in an instant changes her plan and throws herself at Ulixes's knees (691), groveling at his feet (692 f.). Invoking the most humane principles (694–697), she entreats him twice to have mercy: *miserere matris* (694 and 703)—with an additional comment at the end that both reveals and conceals her true emotions (703 f.): *unicum adflictae mihi / solamen hic est*. Understandably Ulixes permits himself no emotional reaction to this Andromacha: *exhibe natum et roga* (704). First the son. ...

When Andromacha sings in anapaests (705–735) to bring Astyanax from the burial mound she gives us a final sample of her theatrical art: she kneels down, showing Astyanax how to stretch out his arms and beg Ulixes to have pity (708 ff.); but at the same time she transforms him into a living picture of the child-Priam who long ago was supposed to have knelt before Hercules (718 ff.). The effect of her performance is not lost on Ulixes, who almost apologizes for the heartlessness to which the *raison d'état* compels him (736–738). However, when Andromacha, full of pathos, tries to demonstrate the absolute harmlessness of her innocent child, he has no more time or patience to repeat his earlier considerations (536 ff.), but, recalling Calchas's command (749), breaks off the discussion sharply.

This is a turning-point;²⁷ Andromacha, seeing only now that she no longer has any chance, abandons the pretence she has been keeping up since line 556 and gives her emotions free rein: first to her anger at Ulixes before whom she has so long had to humiliate herself (750–766). Then come the *dolores* (762), the *lacrimae*, and the *fletus* (765, cf. 785 f.), for Ulixes, always as humane as possible within his time limits, allows her to make her final farewell. Here, in our economically structured tragedy, genuine tears flow for the first

²⁷ It corresponds exactly to the turning point in Sen. *Med.* at line 530.

time—those mentioned in the *kommos* (67, 116, 131, 142) were of a ritual nature—here, for the first time, unfeigned, spontaneous pain and grief find their expression as Andromacha now weeps for her son and the loss of all the hopes placed in him (766 ff.). Yet, as a genuine hero's mother and in spite of her deepest sorrow, she succeeds in deriving from her son's execution a little comfort for her pride (789 f.): [...] *occidis paruus quidem, / sed iam timendus* [...]; and again, almost ecstatically, she sends him away to Troy's hall of heroes beyond the grave (791): [...] *i, uade liber, liberos Troas uide*. One can understand why the boy cries (his only words): *miserere mater!* (792). This mother is pitiless.

The last part of the act again shows Andromacha exclusively as a hero's widow. Now that Astyanax has lost his function as bearer of hope he is transformed into a messenger of love: it is his task to carry not just the torn-out hair, the kisses, and the tears but also her final message (802–806): "Return like Achilles!" (a provocation calculated to make Hector react). While Ulixes then has the child dragged away she buries her face in a piece of clothing she has taken from him; her intention is not to caress this souvenir of her maternal love, but to examine it for possible remains of Hector's ashes (809–812)! Very likely she remains on stage in this striking attitude until the next act.

The Trojan women now reappear on stage and in a short choral ode we see women who, in sharp contrast to Andromacha, have already come to terms with their fate and are preparing themselves mentally for their future in Greek captivity (814–860). The pleasant, rather superficial ode is written in charming Sapphics and its main purpose is to allow the viewers to recover a little after the onslaught of the contradictory passions in the previous act.²⁸

The fourth act matches the third in pathos. In content, too, it forms almost an exact parallel to the third. There the task was to trace Astyanax, the first sacrificial victim; here Polyxena must be induced to agree to a pretended marriage with Pyrrhus, which is in reality a bloody union with Achilles: at the end of both acts we see the victims dragged off (*abripite*: 813, *abreptam*: 1003). Here, intrigue is employed immediately. The task is given to Helena, who after ten years at Troy must now against her will collaborate once more with the Greeks; she describes to Polyxena all the pleasant aspects of such a splendid match (871–882)—and without delay a row of maidservants are on the spot to dress the girl appropriately for her wedding (883–887). In a dumb show²⁹ Polyxena rejects the proffered wedding dress and is supported in this

²⁸ For this function of choral odes cf. Stroh 1994: 261–263 (= 2008: 212–215).

²⁹ On the stage-action of this scene cf. Stroh 1994: 259 f. (= 2008: 210–212); in agreement with this Schmidt 2001: 350.

by her cousin Andromacha, who attacks Helena as the real cause of the world conflict (888–902). At first Helena tries to defend herself, indicating her own suffering (903–923), but finally, overcome by her own pain and that of the other side, she can no longer restrain her tears (925–927) and confesses the truth: No wedding is planned, Polyxena's blood must be shed (938–944). Wonder of wonders! All of a sudden, Polyxena accepts the wedding dress (945–948). Death is open to her and death is her choice. While she joyfully prepares for the wedding with all the servants running excitedly to and fro, Hecuba falls to the ground, only now overcome by her suffering and bursting into uncontrollable weeping (949 ff.). This contrast between mother and daughter gives emblematic emphasis to one of the main ideas of the play: being obliged to live may be much harder than being allowed to die.

Once more the end of the act is turbulent. Pyrrhus appears in wordless pantomime—his “bride,” too, never says a word—Hecuba throws herself in his path crying “Kill me!” (1000–1003). While he brutally drags off Polyxena (who would just as willingly follow him joyfully), her mother summons all her strength to curse the Greek fleet with which she herself must soon depart (1005–1008), and that, worst of all, as the booty of Ulixes. How far is this desperate woman from the philosophical figure of the first act! After Andromacha and Helena she is now the third to shed uncontrollable tears. Thus, in the bond of weeping, in the shared desire for death³⁰ we see the common feelings of these three very different women: the *mater dolorosa*, the hero's widow, the noble *femme fatale*.

As after the third act there follows here a rather more frivolous choral ode in a gently touching mood set in Sapphics (1009–1055): *Dulce maerenti populus dolentum*—“Grief shared is grief halved”—not because it does one good to weep away one's sorrows on the shoulder of a friend but because it helps to know that other people enjoy no better lot than oneself (1023). After this rather heartless reflection the thought moves associatively to that moment in the future when all must finally leave Troy, when the smoke of Troy will be nothing but a faint spiral on the horizon. Once more Seneca is not trying to penetrate deeper into the emotions that have been aroused, but rather to create a contrast to these.

The fifth act deals in a two-part messenger speech with the noble, fearless deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena (*uterque letum mente generosa tulit* 1064); it is the only act that relies on the spoken word alone. Though the pictures

³⁰ 963 f., 1169–1177: Hecuba; 418 (cf. 968, 969): Andromacha; 925–927: Helena. Steidle 1941: 227 (cf. 229) was right to recognize in the “increase of suffering” a structural principle of the piece.

are undeniably powerful in which Seneca via the messenger³¹ describes not only the behavior of the two youthful victims but also that of the audience at the execution—almost a play within a play (*theatri more*: 1125)—nothing of what is said is actually presented visually. This is quite surprising when one considers that Seneca, at the end of *Phaedra*, does not hesitate to have Hippolytus's corpse brought on stage piece by piece (and in other places, too, shows no disinclination toward horror scenes, particularly at the end of his plays). Here he has decided *not* to imitate Euripides (*Troades* 1123 ff.), who had the dead Astyanax brought in on Hector's shield so that he might be mourned. Seneca clearly did not wish to have the end of his play marked by the desperate mourning for the dead—almost unavoidable if the corpses had been produced—but by the exemplary courage with which his figures met their deaths: Astyanax, proud as a young lion, offers resistance to his execution (1092–1098) and anticipates it by a voluntary leap (1102 f.); Polyxena, on Achilles's funeral mound, courageously faces the thrust of Pyrrhus's sword (1151 f.) and even in the throes of death tries to make the earth heavy for her dead “bridegroom” (1158 f.)—a patriot almost beyond the last breath of life.

This, the final act, is also brought to a conclusion by Hecuba, symbol of the now utterly wasted Troy. This time her words are no curse but a moving prayer to *Mors*, the silent heroine of the drama. Why, she asks, does she come only to children and not to her, the woman bent with years? (1171–1177): a dry summons calls all the women to the ships: “Departure!” (1178 f.).

With good reason Joseph Justus Scaliger described our tragedy as “the first of all Seneca's” (*omnium Senecae [...] princeps*);³² Daniel Heinsius placed it far above the *Hekabe* of Euripides,³³ and Martin Opitz, who also considered it “the finest among the Roman tragedies,”³⁴ translated it into German—probably the first German translation of any ancient tragedy (1625). Any monotony is only on the surface; certainly the three central acts are full of the most exciting, carefully motivated action; the third act, the first “police interrogation” of world literature, is in its structure perfectly unique, recalling

³¹ Since at the end the messenger summons the women to the ships (1178 f.), he must be a Greek (as, for example Fantham 1982: 366 believes); it is all the more noteworthy that he, under the influence of events, brands the action of the Greeks *asscelus* (1057, 1129) and *nefas* (1119).

³² Letter to Salmasius 20.11.1607; quoted from Friedrich G. Welcker, *Die griechischen Tragödien mit Rücksicht auf den epischen Cyclus*, Suppl. II.3, Bonn 1841: 1453 n. 53.

³³ *In L. & M. Senecae [...] Tragedias animadversiones et notae*, 21620; quoted in Vogt, Stroh and Trautmann 1993: 105.

³⁴ *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1978: 431: “die schönste vnter den Römischen Tragödien.”

something finely calculated at a drawing board. The art of characterization found in the six main figures, male and female, bears comparison with anything in Sophocles or Ibsen.

Above all Seneca has succeeded in turning one theme of his reflections, the *meditatio mortis* as precondition of the successful life, into the subject of a drama. Two children, Astyanax and Polyxena, accomplish what many adults, including Agamemnon, fail to achieve: mastery of the fear of death. This does not necessarily mean that our tragedy is the bearer of a specifically Stoic message, often hastily ascribed to Seneca. The two young heroes are in fact *too* young to be genuine Stoical sages; and, strictly speaking, their patriotic fury must in the end disqualify them from such a role. Nevertheless, as *argumentum a minori* they are witnesses to the fact that life is not the greatest of all possessions.

The philosopher Seneca knew of two alternatives concerning death (corresponding approximately to Socrates's opinion in Plato's "Apology" and to Cicero's in his first book of the "Tusculan Disputations"): death is either total nothingness—and therefore not to be feared—or there is perhaps a happy continuation of life for the soul freed from the body.³⁵ Seneca's drama leaves the question open. The first choral ode, sung by the women of Troy, enthuses irrationally about blessed Elysium; in the second, the Greek men wrestle with the problem and come to the conclusion that they can welcome death as nothingness. As a contrast to these earnest odes, which take away death's sting, and to the increasing pathos of the last three acts we have the two choral odes that separate them. Here we listen to the song of women who have almost shaken off the horrors of war and who are calmly and a little sentimentally trying to accustom themselves to the idea of the next stage of life in a new homeland. Thus, in some of his choruses Seneca is not above giving expression to ordinary people's philosophy of life.³⁶*

³⁵ *Epist.* 24.18: *mors nos aut consumit aut exuit*. More in Fantham 1982: 78–92 ("Death and the Dead in Seneca's 'Troades'"), a chapter well worth reading. Cf. note 7 *supra*.

³⁶ A certain banality for the themes of the choral odes is even prescribed by Horace, *ars* 197–201. In other respects as well Seneca seems to me to have fulfilled all the demands made of tragedy by Horace.

* This paper was completed at the beginning of 2007 in agreement with the editor's contract. Now when after a delay of six years I got the complete pages with fixed pagination for proofreading it was technically impossible to refer to more recent bibliography. Only two papers (Stroh 2008, Heil 2013) had in the meantime been supplied. This is especially regrettable in the case of Kugelmeier 2007, because this bold scholar has tried to use just our Munich performance of *Troas* (1993, cf. *supra*, n. 8) as new evidence for the old thesis that Seneca's tragedies could be meant only for recitation. I shall have to look for another opportunity to argue with him.

PHOENISSAE

Marica Frank

DATING

Phoenissae, the title by which the play is generally known, is taken from the *E* MSS; in the *A* MSS the play is entitled *Thebais*, a name associated with epic rather than tragedy. Although absolute dates cannot be assigned to any of Seneca's dramas, there are several good reasons to believe that *Phoenissae* was Seneca's last play. First, there are stylistic considerations. On the basis of Fitch's hypothesis that the frequency of mid-line sense-pauses is indicative of a dramatist's confidence with the meter, *Phoenissae* would seem to be Seneca's last play. Fitch's discovery that the shortening of the final -o, particularly in the first person singular of present and future active verbs, occurs more often in *Phoenissae* than in any of the other dramas, supports this chronology (Fitch 1981: 290 f., 303–305). Second, *Phoenissae* treats the Theban legend in a unique way, combining the story of Oedipus in exile with the conflict of Eteocles and Polyneices over the kingship of Thebes in a way that highlights and contrasts the roles of the parents, Oedipus and Jocasta. Such an innovative treatment of the legendary material suggests the confidence of a seasoned tragedian. Third, there is the play's state of incompleteness: it consists of only 664 lines of iambic trimeter, and lacks both a chorus and a final act.¹ It seems plausible that Seneca, having already written a conventional Oedipus play in which Oedipus blinds himself, Jocasta commits suicide, and Oedipus stumbles off into exile, embarked on an adventurous literary experiment. Perhaps the dramatic difficulties proved irresolvable or, possibly, Seneca's withdrawal from Nero's court in AD 62 interrupted his composition.

¹ Tarrant 1978: 229 f., 251–253 argues that the play is complete as it stands and was intended by Seneca as a dramatic experiment, along the lines of Ezekiel's *Exagoge*, in that it has no chorus and requires two changes of scene.

CONTENT

Phoenissae can be divided into four acts (1–319, 320–362, 363–442, 443–664),² but the more obvious division is into two parts, the first dominated by Oedipus and the second by Jocasta (who has clearly not committed suicide). Lines 1–362 deal with the anguish of the exiled Oedipus as he anticipates the strife between his sons; lines 363–664 treat Jocasta's maternal anguish in response to the same event.

The play opens with the blind Oedipus and Antigone on a path in the wild countryside near Thebes, possibly on Cithaeron itself. Oedipus is overwhelmed by a fresh wave of guilt and pollution (205–207). He praises Antigone's filial *pietas* (80) but begs her to abandon him so that he may stumble to his death, since he considers his self-blinding an inadequate recompense for his crimes. Antigone attempts to persuade her father to face his troubles with courage and live on (190–192), declaring that he does not deserve death and insisting on his innocence (204 f.). Oedipus acknowledges his legal innocence but brushes it aside as irrelevant in the face of the objective horror of his crimes (218): *dura fugio scelera quae feci innocens*. It emerges eventually that the reason for his renewed *furor* is the news of the armed conflict that is about to erupt between Eteocles and Polyneices (278–284), whose impending crimes against Thebes, their fellow-citizens, and one another Oedipus sees as proof that they are his offspring (284–287). Antigone immediately tries to use to her advantage the cause of her father's new longing for death, arguing that, if Oedipus has no other reason to continue living, this one is enough (289 f.): *ut pater natos regas / graviter furentes*. Oedipus counters her plea by saying that his sons have no respect for their father (301). He reasserts his determination to seek death (305 f.) and Antigone, having exhausted her arguments, collapses in tears at his feet as a suppliant (306 f.). Then, with a sudden change of heart,³ Oedipus, whose *libido moriendi* could not be weakened by persuasion and argument, yields to his daughter's tears and for her sake agrees to live (319).

This is as much as Oedipus will concede, however. The attempt of the Nuntius from Thebes to persuade him to return there to mediate between his sons gets short shrift from him. On the contrary, he urges his sons on to

² Tarrant 1978: 229 divides the work into five scenes: 1–319, 320–362, 363–402, 403–442. There does not, however, seem to be a good reason for a change of scene at 402.

³ These occur frequently in Senecan drama; cf. *Phaedr.* 251, *Thy.* 488, 542, *Med.* 294 f., *Ag.* 307.

commit crimes worthy of their father (333). The first half of the play concludes with Oedipus declaring that he will hide in a cave or in the thick undergrowth and catch what news he can of his sons' strife (359–362).

The second half of the play begins at line 363 with Jocasta's lament (363–386). This parallels the outburst of Oedipus with which the play opens (1–50). There is no indication in the text of a change of scene at 363, but the action presumably shifts to the walls of Thebes, from which Jocasta must be imagined to survey the battlefield.⁴ Jocasta's extreme wretchedness at her sons' impending struggle expresses itself in her exclamation, *Felix Agave* (363): she perversely envies the mother who unknowingly dismembered her own son on the grounds that she did not, like Jocasta herself, add to her own guilt by bearing impious sons (367–369). She is recalled at 387 from her lamentations by the Satelles, who tells her that the battle lines are drawn up on both sides (388–392), draws her attention to the cloud of dust thrown up by the horses' hooves (394–396), and urges her to mediate between her warring sons before it is too late (401 f.). Antigone supports the Satelles's plea and Jocasta declares that she will go and place herself between the opposing armies, so that if one brother insists on attacking the other, he will have to kill her first (407–414). In a unique transition speech, the Satelles describes Jocasta's flight to the battlefield as it is taking place, her arrival between the lines of battle and the freezing of hostile activities as she pleads with both sides (427–442). This dramatic innovation, cinematic in character and a development of the conventional messenger speech, which recounts events that have already occurred, enables Seneca to achieve a seamless change of scene so that we rejoin the action on the battlefield in line 443.⁵

As Jocasta pleads with her sons, the urgent tension of the situation is underlined by the reluctance of each to disarm while the other remains armed. Eventually, both lay aside their weapons. Jocasta addresses herself first to Polyneices in an exchange reminiscent of the encounter between Coriolanus and his mother, Veturia. She laments his exile, his foreign marriage, and the fact that she now must fear him as an enemy of Thebes (500–525). She draws a vivid picture of the destruction that he will bring on his homeland and implores him to withdraw his forces (584 f.). In response to Polyneices's objection that if he yields, he will be forever a penniless exile and humiliatingly

⁴ Cf. the *teichoskopia* in Euripides's *Phoenissae* 101–201 where, by contrast, the setting of the scene is made explicit.

⁵ Although there are other transition speeches in Seneca's plays and an instance of a character describing offstage action as it is actually occurring, there is nothing like this scene change elsewhere in Senecan drama (see Frank 1995a: 192).

subject to his father-in-law and his rich wife (586–598), Jocasta urges him to win a kingdom for himself anywhere but in Thebes (599–643). Polyneices demurs (643 f.): *Sceleris et fraudis suae / poenas nefandus frater ut nullas ferat?* Jocasta assures him that Eteocles will pay a heavy price for ruling Thebes, since no Theban thus far has held the throne with impunity and Eteocles is even less likely to do so since, unlike his predecessors, he broke a sacred oath by seizing the kingdom (645–651).

PROBLEMS

The allocation of lines in the passage of *stichomythia* with which the play breaks off is problematic. In both *E* and *A* the lines of the final dialogue are given to Polyneices and Jocasta.⁶ Zwierlein (1986a: 122) assigns them to Eteocles and Jocasta. In his new Loeb translation, Fitch (2002: 328), following Grotius, has the speakers as Eteocles and Polyneices. This has the merit of avoiding having either brother standing by in awkward silence. On the other hand, it demands a radical departure from the accepted form of the legend by making Polyneices resign his claim to the throne (*Regna, dummodo invisus tuis*: 653). Such a bold divergence from the legendary tradition does not occur elsewhere in Senecan drama. For this reason, it seems best, despite the dramatic awkwardness of Polyneices's unresolved situation, to assign the final exchange to Eteocles and Jocasta. The play thus breaks off with Eteocles refusing to yield his position of power and with uncertainty as to whether Polyneices has acceded to Jocasta's entreaties to withdraw.

Apart from the way Seneca combines two strands of the legendary material, the most striking feature of *Phoenissae* is its state of incompleteness: there are no choral lyrics and no ending. Given that there is a chorus in every other Senecan tragedy, it seems reasonable to suppose that Seneca intended there to be one also in *Phoenissae*. If the title of the play is that of the *E* MSS (*Phoenissae*) and if the title goes back to Seneca, which is not certain, it suggests that Seneca planned to follow Euripides in having a chorus composed of captive Phoenician women.⁷ It is possible that Seneca actually

⁶ In 651f. *E* and *A* both read: POL. *numero et est tanti mihi / cum regibus iacere*, with *A* assigning *te turbae exulum / ascribo* (652f.) to Jocasta. The obvious difficulty with giving the final exchange to Polyneices and Jocasta is that it transfers to Polyneices, the victim in the broken agreement, the unscrupulous lust for power associated by Euripides with Eteocles and it destroys the sympathy for the exile generated by Jocasta's speeches (Frank 1995a: 252).

⁷ The scene change, from the wild countryside outside Thebes to the city itself, might have posed problems for a single chorus, but Seneca shows himself elsewhere to be not much

composed choral odes, which have been lost in the transmission, but it seems more likely, given the general detachment of the Senecan chorus from the action and the stock themes found in many choral odes, that he planned to insert the choral lyrics after completing the dialogue parts of the play. Tarrant's hypothesis that the play is complete as it stands is particularly problematic with regard to the ending, which is so inconclusive as to leave frustrated the dramatic expectations of the reader, directed as they are from the beginning of the play toward the warring brothers' battle for Thebes. Seneca may have intended a final act in which the anticipated battle was described and the deaths of Jocasta, Eteocles, and Polyneices announced (possibly in a messenger speech) and with Oedipus perhaps still hiding in the wilderness (although this would demand yet another change of scene), but in the absence of any shred of evidence this can be no more than speculation.

Allowing that *Phoenissae* lacks choral odes and an ending, its structure is still unconventional. If one discerns four acts in the work (1–320, 321–362, 363–442, 442–664), it must be acknowledged that these are of uneven length and that the second act is very short (the next shortest act in the Senecan *corpus* is the prologue to *Medea* which is 55 lines long).⁸

The clear division of *Phoenissae* into two parts—the Oedipus part (1–362) and the Jocasta part (363–664)—led scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to argue over whether the two parts belong to one play or two.⁹ Since that time, however, a wealth of structural parallels, verbal echoes, deliberate contrasts, and thematic continuity between the two halves has been discerned, which both puts the question of the unity of the work beyond doubt and suggests strongly that Seneca's main dramatic purpose was to deal with the contrasting reactions of Oedipus and Jocasta to the impending war between their sons. Against the wild guilt of Oedipus and his *impius furor* against his sons is set the *pietas* of Jocasta who loves both her sons and earnestly wants them to be reconciled. She believes—wrongly, as it transpires—that she can achieve this on the basis of their *pietas* toward her.

interested in details concerning the chorus: in *Phaedr.* the identity of the chorus is so vague that even its sex is not specified. The notion of a peripatetic chorus, which might have united the action of the two halves of the play, is not without appeal. See Frank 1995a: 10.

⁸ There has by no means been agreement among scholars on the play's division into four acts. Mesk 1915: 290 discerned only three acts (1–319, 320–362, 363–664). Tarrant 1978: 229, as we have said, divided the work into five scenes. Hirschberg 1989: 2–4 argued that the *Fluchszene* (320–362) is too short to constitute a separate act and that it, like 363–442, is a scene within an act. Thus he divides the play into only two acts (1–362 and 363–664), each of which consists of two scenes.

⁹ For the scholarship on this debate, see Frank 1995a: 3.

Antigone's filial *pietas* toward Oedipus is juxtaposed with his lack of paternal *pietas* toward her, while Jocasta's *pietas* contrasts with the *impietas* of her sons.¹⁰ Like Oedipus, she is highly conscious of her pollution—her piling up of guilt in 367–369 parallels that of Oedipus in 270–276—but she does not descend into the same destructive self-loathing as he does, saved perhaps by her maternal instincts.

The contrast between Oedipus and Jocasta is supported by verbal echoes of the first section in the second, the most notable being *ibo, ibo* spoken by Oedipus in 12 and echoed by Jocasta in 407. Oedipus is insisting that he will rush to his death wherever he can find it, while Jocasta is about to interpose her body between the opposing armies. His overwhelming sense of guilt, reawakened by news of the conflict between his sons, provokes a fresh desire for death, whereas in Jocasta's case, it causes her to want to prevent further impiety in the family. In 355 Oedipus, reveling in his sons' wickedness, cries, *frater in fratrem ruat*; in 443 f. Jocasta says, *in me omnis ruat / una iuventus*. Against his self-destructive urge, which extends to a desire for his sons to attack each other, is counterpoised her willingness to sacrifice herself to prevent just that eventuality. Oedipus longs for *maiusque quam quod casus et iuvenum furor / conatur aliquid* (353 f.); Jocasta, standing between the two armies, is horror-struck at almost having witnessed *maius [...]* *nefas, / quam quod miser videre non potuit pater* (531 f.). In search of a crime even more dreadful than any yet committed in the family, Oedipus orders his sons, *date arma matri* (358).¹¹ His words are echoed in Jocasta's contrasting plea for the brothers to refrain from violence against each other, *dexteras matri date* (450).

The strongest instance of thematic unity between the two parts is that of the conflict between Eteocles and Polyneices. In 1–362 there is what Pratt called “a crescendo of reference” (Pratt 1939: 65) to the struggle for the throne; this reaches its climax in 363–664, where the brothers' armies are drawn up

¹⁰ On the importance of the language of *pietas* and *impietas* as underpinning the contrast between the two parents, see Fitch 2002: 276.

¹¹ The MSS read *patri*, but *matri* makes better sense in view of Oedipus's longing for a crime *quod meos deceat toros* (357). What exactly *date arma matri* means is not clear since the most obvious interpretation—that the brothers should supply Jocasta with weapons for use in the battle—although bizarre, does not suggest a crime in Oedipus's own style. Fitch's translation, *let your mother have your weapons*, with the insertion of “your” before weapons, seems to exclude the obvious interpretation. However, it well reflects the ambiguity of the Latin, which could imply either “turn your weapons on your mother” (to kill her) or “provide her with weapons” (so that she may kill herself) or—and this would certainly accord with Oedipus's desire for a crime of his own sort—Oedipus could be urging his sons to rape their mother (Fantham 1983: 65), since *arma* is often used metaphorically of the penis.

and the war is about to begin. The character of Antigone, too, serves to unite the two sections of the play: she is present with Oedipus in the countryside outside Thebes and present later also with Jocasta on the battlements of the city. The difference in the role she plays with each parent, restraining the one and urging on the other, highlights the contrast in the reactions of Oedipus and Jocasta to the coming battle and points to Seneca's dramatic purpose in *Phoenissae*.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

A striking feature of the language of *Phoenissae* is the rhetorical use of family terms (this is true also, to a somewhat lesser extent, of *Oedipus*).¹² The tangled web of relationships in the Theban royal house is underscored by the avoidance of proper names in direct address and the emphatic use of family terms in both halves of the play. *Phoenissae* is the only play of Seneca's in which no character addresses any other by name. Only once does a character mention another by name (Jocasta mentions Oedipus by name in 554). Instead, characters consistently and insistently address and refer to one another using family terms. These occur much more frequently in *Phoenissae* than in any other Senecan drama. Seneca's use of family terms in his Theban plays, particularly in *Phoenissae*, draws attention constantly to the confusion of relationships reigning within the Theban royal family. The consistency with which he employs this device in both halves of the play constitutes a further link between them. It also reinforces Seneca's interpretation of the traditional curse on the house of Laius as a hereditary taint passed on within the family.

It is noteworthy that in the second half of *Phoenissae* Jocasta appears to show a consciousness of the power of kin words within the internal world of the play: for example, her appeal to her sons in 408f. is constructed in such a way that *matrem* is withheld to the end of the sentence and *matre* occurs again in 410. Jocasta realizes that her appeal rests on the cornerstone of her motherhood and the respect due to her as a mother and she exploits the word *mater* to strike at her sons' consciences.

The influence of declamation is very obvious in *Phoenissae*. Antigone fulfills the restraining *nutrix* role in the first half of the play and the whole of the putative first act (1–319) is a dramatic *suasoria*. Jocasta's attempts to

¹² For a fuller treatment of this topic, see Frank 1995b: 121–129.

persuade Polyneices to lay down his arms in 443–664 are also reminiscent of a *suasoria* and the situation of the second section of the play has the tortuous complexity and all the paradoxes of a *controversia*: Polyneices is in the right in that he has been cheated out of the throne, but he plans to right that wrong by committing a greater wrong, attacking his own city. His intention is to regain his right to the throne, but if he succeeds, he will have destroyed the city he desires to rule. Jocasta is overjoyed to see Polyneices again, but wants him to abandon his warlike enterprise, knowing that he will then go away and be lost to her once more.

SOURCES

The traditional view of Seneca, which regarded him as an imitator of Greek tragedy, consequently held that the first half of his *Phoenissae* was based on Sophocles's *Oedipus Coloneus* and the second half on Euripides's *Phoenissae*. Tarrant's ground-breaking article exploring the dramatic and non-dramatic Roman influences on Seneca,¹³ changed the direction of Senecan scholarship, and initiated his rehabilitation as a Roman writer in a Roman world influenced by Roman authors, Roman socio-political forces, and Roman literary trends. In truth, the surface similarities between Sophocles's *Oedipus Coloneus* and Seneca's *Phoenissae* amount to very little when subjected to close scrutiny and it is possible that Seneca had no more than a general awareness of the content of the Greek play.¹⁴ The similarities between Euripides's *Phoenissae* and the second half of Seneca's play are greater, but there are no convincing verbal reminiscences of the Greek drama in the Roman. The similar treatment of aspects of the legendary material in both plays¹⁵ may be due to Seneca's having used as a source an earlier Roman drama that adhered closely to its Greek model. No Augustan drama on themes of Seneca's *Phoenissae* is known to have existed, but the fragments of Accius's *Phoenissae* that have survived from the Republican period suggest a close dependence on Euripides's *Phoenissae*. However, there are no close verbal parallels between Seneca and Accius, and, with the Republican play being

¹³ Tarrant 1978: 213–263.

¹⁴ Frank 1995a: 17–20.

¹⁵ See, for example, the *teichoskopia*, the sympathetic portrayal of Polyneices and the depiction of Eteocles as an unredeemed tyrant, Jocasta's lament about Polyneices's foreign marriage, and Polyneices's consciousness of the humiliation of being noble but poor.

fragmentary and Seneca's *Phoenissae* incomplete, it cannot be conclusively shown that the aspects in which Seneca's play resembles Euripides's were derived from Accius's work.

A non-dramatic Roman source, which may have influenced Seneca's *Phoenissae*, is Livy's account of the story of Coriolanus (Liv. 2.40). Although, again, there are no striking verbal parallels, there is a general similarity of sentiment and situation.

RECEPTION

The most distinctive contribution of Seneca's *Phoenissae* to dramatic posterity in Europe probably resides in the character of Eteocles, the supreme tyrant, and particularly in the way he articulates his attitude to power. In the final two lines, Jocasta queries, *Patriam penates coniugem flammis dare?* Eteocles defiantly hurls back, *Imperia pretio quolibet constant bene*. He is willing to sacrifice human ties and to rule in a ruined city as long as the power over it belongs to him alone. He desires power, not for the advantages it promises of wealth or status or adulation, but simply for its own sake.¹⁶ The character of other tyrants in Senecan drama—Atreus, for instance—may be more fully developed, but no other Senecan tyrant is prepared to sacrifice everything for power; Renaissance tyrants, however, are.

One might compare Garnier's *Antigone* 2.927–935, dating from the late sixteenth century, which expands on *pretio quolibet* to detail exactly what Eteocles is prepared to sacrifice personally: *Je ferois volontiers femme & enfans mourir, / Brusler temples, maisons, foudroyer toute chose*. Garnier closes by echoing Eteocles's words: *C'est tousjours bon marché quelque prix qu'on y mette, / Nul n'achette trop cher, qui un Royaume achette*.

Corneille in 1651 had Nicomède declare that *Une véritable Roy n'est, ny père, / Il regarde son trosne & rien de plus. Régnéz, / Rome vous craindra plus qui vous ne la craignez* (*Nicomède* 4.3.1320–1322). Again we see the echo of Eteocles's readiness to buy power at the price of human relationships.

Similarly, Shakespeare's lines, "But for a kingdom any oath may be broken: / I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year" (3 Henry VI. 1. 2.16 f.) suggest the willingness to sacrifice the most fundamental moral tenets for the sake of power. The same sentiment is found in Jonson's *Sejanus* 2.175–177, published in 1603:

¹⁶ Braden 1985: 32 observes that it is "a power all the more final because it is empty; it tolerates no life outside itself."

MEDEA

Wolf-Lüder Liebermann

Seneca's *Medea*, the dating of which is uncertain (but which likely originates from pre-Neronian times), deals with Medea's cruel vengeance on Jason. This vengeance was inflicted after numerous crimes in connection with the Argo's voyage and the return of the Golden Fleece, crimes from which Jason himself profited although they had been committed by Medea, and after he had found refuge with Creon, the ruler of Corinth, together with Medea and their two children. Creon, however, offers his daughter Creusa in marriage to Jason and Jason willingly accepts, separates from Medea, and seeks to divorce himself from his past, to become "unfaithful" to it.

The action is exposed by Medea in her introductory monologue (1–55). Medea, in contrast to Jason, intends to keep the past alive, that is, to maintain continuity with it and to preserve her identity. Significantly, she evokes the gods, who represent her realm in particular (8 f.)—the eternal night of chaos, the underworld, Pluto, and Proserpina—imploping them in a voice auguring misfortune (*voce non fausta precor*: 12). These are the deities and the realms assigned to them, which will gain decisive importance in the magic scene, in which she prepares deadly vengeance on Creon and Creusa (740–842). The invocation of the furies—they, too, will become part of the action (958–968)¹—causes continuity (16 f.; cf. also 52–55) and anticipates action:² the death of the new wife and of Creon (17b–18). But Jason (19–25a) shall live—a worse punishment—exiled, homeless, and outlawed. He, too, is met with an uninterrupted and "faithful" sequel to his life up to that point, this time, however, without Medea's help. "Children resembling father and mother (i.e., Medea)"³ are part of this continuance. The idea of infanticide as central to the plot is already apparent (25 f.),⁴ as a connotation to the recipient, who is

¹ Cf. also 157 (with annotation by Hine 2000).

² With regard to Medea's monologue as "Bedeutungsraum," cf. Schmidt 2004a: 347 f.

³ Regarding this much-treated passage, see editions and commentaries, as well Krafft 1994: 330–340, Fitch 2004b: 79. This passage however, which is by no means difficult, is related to Jason's desired loneliness and helplessness, as imagined by Medea, when after their separation he has to do without her support and therefore desires the return of the "Medea-world."

⁴ It is, at any rate, evident that the children will play an important part in the execution of revenge. Cf. Hine 2000: 118 f. and Fitch 2004b: 80, ad 40.

familiar with the version of the myth fashioned by Euripides (maybe not as the first one). The request to steer the grandfatherly chariot of the sun not only heralds the magical fire that will destroy the royal palace of Corinth (35 f., 879–890), but prefigures Medea's vanishing in a chariot drawn by serpents at the close of the play.

Medea preserves her identity through continuity (41–55). This identity, however, is perfected by means of a climax typical of Seneca: *haec virgo feci; gravior exurgat dolor: / maiora iam me scelera post partus decent* (49 f.). The *Medea fiam, Medea nunc sum* (171, 910, cf. 166; after Ov. *epist.* 6.151) which infuses the entire play, is based on this; here we encounter “Arbeit am Mythos” (“work on myth”). If, in Seneca's tragedies—coined by life's austerity—, “life-world” and an attitude toward life in the first century AD are reflected,⁵ then one can perhaps conceive it to be a genuine accomplishment of dramatic myth to counter the uncertainty of terror and horror and the eeriness connected to it with a comprehensive pattern, to “name” it by reducing it to the extraordinary appearance⁶ of a *monstrum*. For Medea is, unlike the Medea of Euripides, an isolated figure⁷ of radical assertiveness and a potency that inspires fear. That does not mean that she cannot provoke admiration—moral standards fall too short here.

The drama contains a concretization of what Medea has devised and announced in the prologue; she almost provides the framework, which, significantly, is determined by quantitative appropriateness. Utterances that hint rather than accurately specify create an atmosphere of tense uncertainty and an “aura of evil,”⁸ considering the monstrosities that are to be expected and are reverberating throughout the cosmos. The personal foundation, the fact that Medea decidedly carries the action, with her motivations rising directly from within (cf. 47), certainly suggests a “psychological” interpretation. However, such an observation resolves little: a closer determination of this kind of psychology still remains open, and even the functional context, in which it lies embedded, needs specification.

That a “psychological” interpretation alone hardly suffices, is basically shown in one detail, which finds numerous parallels in Seneca: in the already quoted verse 50 (*maiora iam me scelera post partus decent*) infanticide comes

⁵ Cf. Regenbogen 1927–1928 and Herington 1966: 429–431.

⁶ The Euripidean Medea, by contrast, is an “extraordinary woman,” who draws on criteria and characteristics generally considered as “male” in the fifth century BC (maybe even “forced,” Seidensticker 2005: 350; but cf. Gould 2001: 152; further material in McDonald in Clauss and Johnston 1997: 300 f., Boedeker, *ibid.* 134, 136).

⁷ That has recently been elaborated by Tschiedel 2005: 148–155.

⁸ Herington 1966: 449; cf. Mazzoli in Castagna 1996: 15.

into play anew. The children are not only the cause of an excessive escalation of the *scelera* (within the framework of the contrast *virgo*—*mater*),⁹ but they become an almost logically necessary integral element of that *scelera*'s execution, independent of the fact that the decision to commit infanticide explicitly occurs only later (916–977, cf. 549 f.). This rational calculation, which establishes points of references everywhere, characterizes less Medea than Seneca per se. It is not only to be ascribed to the psychologically satanic connection of criminal passion and cold logic, but is an element of that “Pankorrelationismus,”¹⁰ which represents an intellectual-aesthetic value of its own.

Immediately following Medea's prologue, which augurs gruesome misfortune, the chorus of citizens of Corinth sings the hymenaeus, which functions as situationally integrated dramatic momentum (56–115). Naively serene promises of good fortune (56, 58, 68, 105) contrast with Medea's *non fausta vox*;¹¹ the conventionality as well as the blindness of the chorus (interpreted as absolutely positive by some) proclaims itself not only by including elements customary to the hymenaeus, but also by undauntedly classifying Jason's disengagement from Medea as a return to “normality” (102–106, 114 f.).¹²

The second act (116–300) comprises a monologue by Medea, the stereotypical *domina-nutrix*-scene, and a confrontation between Medea and Creon. If Medea now makes her desire for vengeance dependent on having realized the hymenaeus and her own abandonment (116–120), then she indeed seems to know nothing about Medea's introductory monologue—or she knows that Medea only too well. For she undertakes a new attempt, which again leads to the “entire” Medea. Here it becomes apparent once more that a simple psychological interpretation remains unsatisfactory, even if it takes into consideration emotional turmoil and complexity. Ways of being assertive and of having revenge are reflected under the banner of *Medea fiam* (cf. 124). The desired escalation already mentioned is now reflected in the terms *amor* and *ira*,¹³ which replace the pair of opposites *virgo* and *mater*, and which

⁹ That is underestimated by interpreters who regard the conflict between *monstrum* and *mater* to be constitutive of the drama.

¹⁰ According to Seeck in Lefèvre 1978a: 398, although the expression is accentuated somewhat differently.

¹¹ The invocation of the gods (56–74) forms a contrast to Medea's divine apostrophes (see especially Hine 1989, Davis 1993: 189–195).

¹² The choral ode *Thy.* 122–175 is a parallel, where the prayer for peace and happiness for Tantalus's descendants can only be understood as out of place.

¹³ This applies independently of how one understands *saevit infelix amor* (136). Verse 850 seems to stand for a reference to the present (cf. 866–869).

constitute an additional thread of argument within the compact fabric of relations. It is to be assigned to the almost metonymic “Pankorrelationismus,” if Creusa’s murder is now deduced from the slaying of Absyrtus as an equivalent of vengeance (125), whereas before (17) it was tied in with the opposition “old” vs. “new” wife and with the Medea continuity (which again contains complex and subtle shifts). The dismemberment of Absyrtus, however, obviously prefigured the infanticide (53 f.). If one perceives an element of atonement here, then this is an interpretamentum, which, of course, Seneca is initiating with his wealth of allusions and references.

Part of Medea’s calculation is about the sufficient extent and adequate object of revenge (125–136), but it is also about Jason’s culpability, who is at Creon’s mercy (137 f.). In the process, the *vivat* from the prologue is given various nuances (140–142). A false tone is sounded, if with regard to the much-invoked, still-enduring love of Medea for Jason, which has been compared to Ovid, the term *amor* (136) should now turn into the codeword for an emotional reversal. Medea’s love expresses itself in her prevailing claim to Jason: *si potest, vivat meus*—the addition of *ut fuit, Iason* emphasizes the required continuity. Even if Ovid’s Medea in this context mentions her *merita*, too (Ov. *epist.* 12.21; cf. also *met.* 7.42–61), this still does not turn Seneca’s Medea into an elegiac heroine; Ovid’s *meus* (158) and *te peto* (197) carry a completely different sound. In Ovid Medea’s *merita* have a function within the framework of “appeals,” not of claim (183, 191 f.).¹⁴

Indeed, if a “restitution” of Jason by Creon were conceivable, then Medea’s request would be met, she would be the winner and the play would have no need to continue. (But she will be the winner after all, due to the fact that by slaying the two infants a common ground constituted by continuity is created between Medea and Jason, cf. 933 f., 947–951). In any case, Jason is supposed “to live” (his death, considered in 138 f., is not in Medea’s interest)¹⁵—and “to remember” Medea. Such a situation is not far from that imagined in the prologue, albeit with a significant shift again.¹⁶ Revenge is at first concentrated on Creon—he will be Medea’s next antagonist.

The interplay of *nutrix* and Medea debates technical questions of a possible or at least efficient vengeance. The nurse, whose world provides the foil to that of Medea, seeks to impinge upon her mistress in a warning and mitigating

¹⁴ Guastella (2001: 141–147) has elaborated the alliance of *merita* and losses/sacrifices with regard to Seneca’s Medea; cf. also *infra* p. 469.

¹⁵ Apoll. Rhod. 3.464–466 is no parallel, but there is a distinct allusion to Ov. *met.* 7.24: the point lies precisely in the reinterpretation, which is even suggested by the Ovidian context.

¹⁶ This is a leitmotif throughout the play: e.g., 234 f., 272 f., 465–489, 560–562.

way, thus casting a brighter light onto the latter's audacity and grandeur.¹⁷ With good reason the laconic pronouncements *Medea superest* and *Medea fiam* have their place here.

The subsequent dialogue between Creon and Medea clarifies that Creon fears the "well-known" (181) *monstrum saevum horribile* (191) and intended to eliminate it. But at the request of his new son-in-law, exile has replaced death, which is supposed to protect the kingdom and its citizens from the assaults of the wicked woman (266–271). Here, not only perspectives on the basic principles of royal power open up—whereby Medea documents her equal status with the Corinthian ruler—but also on principles of jurisdiction, including a kind of trial scenery with pleas by the prosecution and the defense.¹⁸

Medea first addresses the benefits that the Greeks, especially Creon himself, have had from the rescue of the Argonauts thanks to her and her actions. Creon has now chosen Jason for a son-in-law—the very man whom she is claiming as her only reward. Second, Creon violates the privilege of kings: to protect suppliants (which she had done herself by rescuing the Argonauts). Finally, it is improper to burden Medea with all the guilt and excuse Jason. For Acastus, Pelias's son, demands Jason's extradition, but Creon seems to want to handle the impending conflict by slaying or exiling Medea and by separating her from Jason (256–265). (The details remain uncertain, but this appears cumulatively as an additional motive for Medea's exile.) The argument of benefit returns: for Jason, and only for him, not only did Pelias have to die, but also all the other misdeeds were committed. That Medea triumphs in argumentation is demonstrated by Creon's testy *quid seris fando moras?* (281)—after he himself had asked her to present her cause (202). But this, too, Medea first had to wrest from him.¹⁹ Medea simply is superior to the king.²⁰

The much-discussed question of whether or not Creon is a coward and weakling, suffers from terminological uncertainty. It is beyond doubt: Creon acts the austere monarch, but he fears Medea. Whether this constellation-based weakness is justified or can be generalized ethopoetically, is another

¹⁷ Cf. 381, 425–430. The part of the nurse is comparable to other secondary characters in Seneca's dramas, e.g., the *satelles* in *Thyestes*, cf. Schiesaro 2003: 153–163.

¹⁸ The *causam tueri* is not unique (relevant passages in Hine 2000: 138, ad 202) and is found in rhetorical practice (Billerbeck 1999: 343, ad *Herc. f.* 401f.) The treatise of issues of law and blame has always belonged to the repertoire of the tragedy, as has the discussion of the exercise of political power (inclusive the *locus de fortuna*).

¹⁹ Cf. *Herc. f.* 398 (with parallels in Billerbeck 1999: 342).

²⁰ Gil Arroyo 1979: 130 n. 1 speaks of Medea's "dialectic force."

question. Pursuing questions such as “character” and “psychology” results in such dubious observations as that Creon does not admit his fear of Medea to her, but pretends that it is the Corinthians’, or the statement that the Corinthians really have nothing to fear, as long as they do not support Creon, that their fear consequently is an expression of a bad conscience. The fact that Creon is classified as a typical tyrant on the one hand and, on the other hand, as a representative of political reason, even humanity (Lawall 1979), shows that such problems are peripheral to the drama.

At last Medea asks for a day’s delay, in order to duly take her leave from the children. Again Creon errs in the sense of external efficiency by granting her wish despite his fear (294 f., cf. 184 f.). Here, too, an ethopoetical interpretation will fail. Should one think that Creon in a humanitarian spirit cedes to an appeal to his emotions, that he is “essentially an untyrannical man, even a generous one” (Fitch 1974: 123 f.), that he possesses a dynasty-based sense of the importance of the children (Fyfe 1983: 81), or can he not withstand Medea’s “dialectic force”?

The question is not who is right or wrong, but who wins. Only then can the entire blame in the third act focus on Jason, Medea’s second antagonist, who similarly will not measure up to her. And probably only then can the chorus in its second ode (301–379)—that ode will find its continuation in the third—ignore everything Medea has brought up, and instead classify Medea as the “reward” for the first sea voyage (i.e., the voyage of the *Argo*).

The catch phrase *Argo reversa* (238) suggests that in contrast to Medea’s pride in her achievement, the topos of the audacity of the first voyager now comes into play and with it an expansion or, more precisely, an integration of the dramatic subject has been issued. Medea, in her presence, “Unhin-tergebarkeit,” and unquestionability—a tendency that has loomed all the time—becomes a part of the world. This is clearly demonstrated in the final part of the choral ode (364–379), where Roman reality is accepted in all its facticity (one will have to assume a reference to Claudius’s invasion of Britain in AD 43).²¹ The seeming “drama of passion” for this reason achieves the quality of a “drama of fate.” Consequently, passions and morality fall into the rank of the preliminary or subordinate within the hierarchy of the dramatic *skopoi* (and of interpretation); a further consequence is that the dissolution of the tragedy by means of a “didactic” purpose is unthinkable.

²¹ On the other hand, the ode as a whole cannot simply be understood as optimistic either, as a triumph of technology, civilization, and human supremacy over nature (Lawall 1979). Cf. also Bajoni in Castagna 1996: 75–85. Tandoi 1992 can protect the reader from an interpretation that is too isolated.

The topos serves to explain the world's misfortune (this becomes evident in Hor. *carm.* 1.3, surely Seneca's major source).²² Therefore, the introduction of the ode is kept in a general form—*audax nimium qui* [...]—that seems to refer to mythical antiquity, until it turns out that we are dealing with the voyage of the Argo. But there is still not a trace of Jason or even his guilt; instead, next to the Argo itself, Tiphys is mentioned: *ausus Tiphys* (318; cf. 346, 336). Medea personifies the only explicit point of reference, a *malum maius mari* (352). The formulation of verse 338 almost holds a key function: the sea as *malum* (and Medea as worse *malum*) forms “part of our fear.” This describes a state of the world and an attitude to life.

In the third act (389–578), the nurse depicts Medea in her *furor*-obsession as a raging maenad²³—and again advises temperance. *Medea fiam* here appears anew in the form of *se vincet* (394). Medea herself resumes the motif of the parallelism of rage and hatred on the one hand, and love on the other (397f.), applying it to various phases of life. Simultaneously, in anchoring it within the cosmic order, it becomes apparent that the desire for vengeance is a Medea-specific natural phenomenon (401–414), albeit with significant shifts: natural necessity is paralleled by a coping with the forces of nature, first as competition (407–410), then as opposition (411–414). Medea represents a natural phenomenon, an elemental force, but it is necessary to draw conclusions from that: the “Unhintergebarkeit” of Medea expresses itself herein.

Here, clearly, the choral ode is referred to: Medea as “an evil worse than the sea” is explained by means of a comparison with Scylla and Charybdis (408–410), and more generally by means of sea metaphors. However, we are dealing here with an intensified conventional imagery. That can preserve us from rash conclusions regarding the interpretation of the Argo's voyage. A reifying concretization (Konkretisierung), the interpenetration of the figurative-linguistic and the objective plane generally, belongs to Seneca's representational mode and style.²⁴ The metonymic shift is stylistically conditioned as well. It shows itself in the expansion of the sea imagery to the

²² For a somewhat different view, see Schindel 1984; cf. Biondi 1984: 205–210.

²³ The image finds its continuation: 806, 849; cf. Costa 1973: 108, ad 382ff., Tarrant 1976: 306, ad *Ag.* 719, Heinze 1997: 248.

²⁴ Cf. Landfester 1974; Liebermann 1974: 85–142, esp. 86–95, 100; as well Fitch 1974: 141–146; Henderson 1983; Billerbeck 1999: 548f., ad *Herc.f.* 1088–1091; Littlewood 2004: 57–68. The imagery can be applied to Euripides as well, see Boedeker in Clauss and Johnston 1997: 129–133, 137.

imagery of rivers, fire, and even wild animals, in which Scylla by means of her dual affiliation meets a hinge function (the comparison of Medea with Scylla already figures prominently in Eur. *Med.* 1343).

The question of responsibility is briefly hinted at: Jason, as next dialogue partner, now appears as the appropriate object of rage—and his imminent petty attempts at justification are already here swept away (415–422). Significantly, the whole issue is bracketed by Medea's *sternam et evertam omnia* (414) and *cuncta quatiām* (425); at its center is *extimuit ferox* (419). *Ferox* is not only meant ironically, but signifies the underlying dilemma: an affiliation to the world of *Medea ferox* demanded by Medea, but revoked by Jason (186, 442).

The debate between Medea and Jason exhibits parallels with the scene of Medea and Creon. More strongly than with Creon the verdict of the critics vacillates in their focus on “character” and morale: is Jason a “human fly” (Henry and Walker 1967: 170); a person focused on reality and its applied norms, who tragically comes to grief because of a vicious, demonic woman (Zwierlein 1978); or even *pīus Iason*, the representative of *mens bona* and *virtus*? Jason acknowledges Medea's services on his behalf, but asserts the well-being of the children (but cf. 513), thereby conjuring up a tragic conflict (431–441). However, then fear of those in power comes into play (493 f., 516–530), love for Creusa (496), and finally the desire, despite all the benefits that he has derived from Medea's misdeeds, not to have blame for any of these crimes assigned to himself, but rather to distance himself (497–505). As a “dropout” from the past shaped by Medea, he seeks to enter the world of “normality” (560–562). His fondness for his children offers Medea her best opportunity for revenge (549 f.). Jason does not understand Medea; he does not reach up to Medea's level and he underestimates her. The final verse, which Medea speaks to herself, before turning to the nurse, is revealing: *perge, nunc aude, incipe / quidquid potest Medea, quidquid non potest* (566 f.). If in Ov. *epist.* 12 the power and powerlessness of Medea constitute a leitmotif, then their basic reinterpretation by Seneca must be realized: we are dealing with a hyperbolic expression of self-aggrandization. The preparations for revenge are made under this motto and the revenge is carried out, first on Creon and Creusa, later on Jason.

These scenes are preceded, however, by a choral ode (579–669), in the first part of which the hatred of the deserted wife is formulated as an irresistible force of nature.²⁵ Then the reflection abruptly (*parcite, o divi, veniam precamur* [...]: 595) switches to the other motivational strand that has been introduced

²⁵ Reflections about love can be found also in Euripides after the altercation between Medea and Jason (*Med.* 627–644).

in the preceding ode, the voyage of the Argo, which is understood as voyage of misfortune, since it has brought death and ruin to all who participated in it in one way or the other. Both parts aim toward the culminating menace, which in the meantime has become concrete: “disaster approaches relentlessly,” one could call the motto of the ode. The chorus knows that the situation has become more or less hopeless (597). Although the conclusion steers back to the question of guilt (*iam satis, divi, mare vindicastis: / parcite iusso*: 668f.), the remarks that are rich in association about the fate of those who were involved in the voyage of the Argo are not covered by it (cf. 646). If one wishes to turn the question of guilt seriously into a criterion, it is not comprehensible why Jason should occupy a special place indeed. (Moreover, the combination of *iam satis* and *iusso* follows two different strategies of argumentation again.)²⁶ The focus of both Argonautic odes is not morality. The chorus inaugurates neither a stringent thought of “sin and atonement” nor the idea of the “curse of the misdeed.”²⁷

Nearly 180 verses are dedicated to the preparation of the deadly gifts (coat, neck- and head ornaments), which are delivered to Jason’s new wife by the children and which will not only burn their wearer but engulf Creon and the entire palace in inextinguishable flames. In part they are conveyed by the nurse, in part Medea herself is acting. Here, the demonization of Medea continues, as it had become apparent especially in the scene with Medea and Creon: For it was Creon who used the phrase *monstrum saevum horribile*, who feared contact (188), and who—despite an allusion to Cic. *Catil.* 1.10 (perhaps going back to the dramatist Accius)—with words distinctly recalling ἀποπομπή or φεῦγε spells (179f., 185, 269f.), wanted to ensure that Medea was abroad.²⁸ However, again, everything converges on continuity (812–816) and “victory” (838f.).

In its last short ode, which is a contrastive counterpart to the first ode, the chorus comments on Medea’s appearance while summarizing her well-known features: *cruenta maenas, amor saevus, impotens furor, vultus citatus ira, ferox* (849–856). Even the chorus can no longer escape Medea’s power and the impending misfortune. *Regi minatur* and *superba*, including the observation that Medea in no way resembles an outcast (855–857), refer to the confrontation. Given this, one will hardly consult the “psychological analysis” provided by the chorus for a decisive and exhaustive description

²⁶ Regarding the “concatenation” of diverse views or several lines of thought, especially in commonplaces, cf. Tarrant 1976: 181–184.

²⁷ There is no “chain-reaction of crime” (Fyfe 1983: 90).

²⁸ Cf., e.g., Johnston in Meyer and Mirecki 1995: 361–387, esp. 386.

of Medea's personality or even make it the focus of the drama. The formula "unbridled love"²⁹ and "rampant rage"—now, however, the combination of both (866–869)—aims at the overwhelming threat; consequently it ends in the timid question: *quid sequetur?*

The *nuntius* conveys the disaster in the briefest mode (879–890)—*concidit regni status* (879), *qua* [scil. *fraude*] *solent reges capi* (881)—whereby the following explication *donis* is part of the intellectual "Pankorrelationismus," which once more develops a momentum of its own.³⁰

Instead of fleeing, Medea, in the last act, faces the second, more important part of her revenge. The *haec virgo feci* returns within the framework of Medea's self-perfection: *quid manus poterant rudes / audere magnum, quid puellaris furor? / Medea nunc sum: crevit ingenium malis*³¹ (908–910). Of course now—repeatedly—we see the typical faltering, the hesitation before the monstrous deed, both connected with the famous "self-instigations," whereby the horror of the intention stands out all the more distinctly. "Mother" and "wife" conflict with one another (928),³²—moral and affective categories such as *fas*, *pudor*, "pure hands," *pietas* and *amor* (now as love for the children) fail. Yet, whereas in comparable scenes in Euripides, and in Ovid as well, real decisions loom, we are dealing in Seneca with impediments that must be overcome in the light of *audere magnum*.

Here, the ingenious calculation with regard to the children's deserving death is to be classified, which in symptomatic amalgamation brings the question of the children's own guilt into play: the children are innocent (but Absyrtus, too, was an innocent victim), however: *scelus est Iason genitor et maius scelus / Medea mater—occidant, non sunt mei; / pereant, mei sunt* (932–936).³³ If one wishes to understand this as Medea's attempt to kill off her

²⁹ Medea counts as one of the great lovers in literature; no inferences can be made to the specific kind of *amor* (a demarcation against the elegy has already been referred to). This obviously applies to 897 f., too: *amas adhuc, furiose* [scil. *anime*; Guastella 2001: 148 n. 33; *furiosa*], *si satis est tibi / caelebs Iason*, which, in turn, is exclusively determined by the idea of climax.

³⁰ This shows itself in the explicit correction by Corneille, who specifically has his Creusa desire the gifts; hardly convincing Littlewood 2004: 168.

³¹ *Mala* are not her misfortunes, but her crimes; Hine (2000: 202, ad 910) and Fitch (2004: 99) want to retain both interpretations.

³² Here, one must consider that the mother's role comprises completely different implications as well: cf. *supra* n. 9, besides 934.

³³ Cf. 950 f., where, *pace* Zwierlein (1978: 51 n. 63, slightly changed in the reprint), Hine 2000, and Fitch 2002 it is to be debated, whether *periere matri* (and the E-version *patri*) should not in fact be preserved. 947 f. reveals that even in the case of the children it is about possession (cf. 947 b), which however is not up to debate, so that we are dealing here with an almost theoretical argumentation. I cannot follow Némethi's 2003 interpretation, which aims at affective sentimentality.

own (not especially emphasized) fondness for the children, then this is a psychologizing interpretation, which does more justice to a bourgeois need for normality than to Seneca. Significantly, all these reflections are headed by a motto typical of Seneca: *nescioquid ferox* [!] / *decrevit animus intus et nondum sibi / audet fateri* (917–919).

This second part of the revenge can readily be understood as an explication of the *incipi* [...], *quidquid non potest* [scil. *Medea*]. Medea kills both sons, one before Jason's eyes (both murders form a unity: Medea simultaneously reflects on the slaying of both infants, cf. also 974). The extent of the revenge is correlated by its "quality," that is, the moral monstrosity of the crime, the decisive verse 901 creates the link: *vindicta levis est quam ferunt purae manus*.

Stringently associated with that is the idea of rescission—as a first step quasi connected with the slaying of the first son—of the sacrifices made for Jason (982–984), whereby what Medea had called her dowry is invoked: homeland, father, brother, *pudor* (488f.).³⁴ The elegiac lament about the loss of the past has turned into a glorious restitution of this past. Medea triumphantly vanishes into the air on a serpent-drawn chariot (1021f.): [...] *ingrate Iason, coniugem agnoscis tuam? / sic fugere soleo*. The line that was already arranged in the prologue thus comes to perfection. The final verse uttered by Jason: *testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos* is bitter sarcasm. It simultaneously demonstrates how little the play that started with an invocation of the gods is to be understood as a play about crime and punishment. Morality is simply suspended. But it is not as if its absence were employed as an essential complementary desideratum, as long as one takes into account the dramatic action itself—Medea's triumph is too convincing,

³⁴ Gill's (1987: 31–36) careful analysis is convincing in many points. If, however, it is a matter of a complex morality, guilt, and self-punishment, then that presupposes an unequivocal understanding of the quotation of Niobe (954–956) as punishment for Medea herself (*poena* in 898 and 922, however, is the punishment of Jason, cf. also 1008b, 1015—Epictetus relates self-punishment to the Medea of Euripides! Cf. Dillon in Clauss and Johnston 1997: 216 f.). This applies as well to the shade of Absyrtus who *poenas petit* (964)—from Jason, for he incited and benefited from the fratricide committed by Medea, with her merely participating as helper (that is Medea's position). How this *poena* is honored, is clearly revealed in 969–971. Medea "opens herself up" to the furies, who seem to be in Absyrtus's service, as carrying out the brother's expiation (cf. *Thy.* 250–254 and Verg. *Aen.* 7.456 f.). Now, after Medea redeems her "services" for Jason (the fratricide is her biggest achievement as her hitherto most gruesome deed), she becomes the brother's avenger. As such and as a "partner in crime" at that time she can say, in the 1st-person plural, *dabimus* [scil. *poenas*] (965: everything speaks in favor of comprehending *omnes* to be in the accusative in this verse—Medea elsewhere speaks of *omnia/cuncta* with regard to her deeds, cf. 414–428, with the equivalent 879: *periere cuncta*).

too fascinating, and too unquestioned. *Sit Medea ferox, invictaque*, Seneca fulfilled this program by Horace (*ars* 123)³⁵—and one can add *Ov. rem.* 375: *tragicos decet ira cothurnos*.

With regard to Medea's much discussed "development" there is no doubt, that the plan for vengeance is being specified over the course of the play (which comprises the increasingly unequivocal necessity of realization), but this is by no means a psychological development. Arbogast Schmitt and Martha Nussbaum have made interesting attempts at a Stoic affect-psychological analysis.³⁶ One would be well advised to demarcate the tracing of descriptive categories of reality—even those of Stoic provenance—against an *interpretatio Stoica* per se. Of course the transition happens fast, is perhaps even systematically necessary: description contains an interpretative and enlightening analysis, which in turn refers to a specific "solution" and would therefore be decisive for an interpretation of the tragedies, as long as moral-ethical behaviors stand in the foreground.³⁷ The therapeutic aspect has recently been emphasized again.³⁸ But would an extirpation of Medea's passion really be desirable? One can only be glad that the "therapeutic emergency program" fails. However, the requested—rightly understood—placement within a larger "Sinnzusammenhang" or "Schicksalszusammenhang" might be conducive to an interpretation of *Medea*. One would thereby do justice to Medea's "Unhintergebarkeit," which is not reconcilable with an affect that is accessible and avoidable by therapy—at any rate as long as one remains on the same receptive plane (cf. *supra* pp. 420 f.).³⁹ Further, such interpretations require a potential for generalization in a radical general-human sense. It is questionable, whether of all approaches, this one opens up an adequate access to the world of Seneca's tragedies. Significantly, at the end of her article, Nussbaum concedes to tragedy and Roman heroism their right in the form of a tension and literature's challenge to philosophy.

³⁵ One can consult here as explanation Cic. *off.* 1.97: *est enim digna persona oratio [...]* *poetae quid quemque deceat, ex persona iudicabunt*, cf. *orat.* 74—the idea of dignity is hence by no means intrinsic to Seneca, as is occasionally thought.

³⁶ Schmitt 1994, Nussbaum in Clauss and Johnston 1997: 219–249; cf. Liebermann 2004: 26 n. 66. Regarding the following cf. *supra* pp. 413–416.

³⁷ Cf. *supra* p. 415.

³⁸ Wiener 2006.

³⁹ Biondi 1984 establishes this context precisely. Since he proceeds from a uniform level of reception, he necessarily comes close to Aeschylean and Old Testament ideas, even a "colpa universale" (59). The difficulty is revealed in the wording: "una sorta di realtà metaindividuale," which, however, is neither "realtà metafisica" nor an "alterità ontologica" (227 n. 45).

All the approaches that move the conflict between emotion and *ratio* into the center belong to a psychological-ethical interpretation. The thesis of identity represents a modification: loss of identity, parody of Stoic *oikeiosis*, and disintegration (Henry and Walker 1967, Henry and Henry 1985), or failure of *oikeiosis*, and distorted *oikeiosis* (Abrahamsen 1993). If Medea wishes to preserve her identity that does not mean that the struggle for identity has become a topic, let alone the central topic of the tragedy. And when Medea hurls against Jason her *coniugem agnoscis tuam?* (1021), then that is a premature conclusion to be understood as an acknowledgement or confirmation of her identity, just as the validation of criminal power by victims and others—inclusive of Jason's spectatorship—first of all pertains to vengeance itself. It is an additional step to evaluate this in the sense of a problem of identity. The necessity to assume two identities (Dupont 2000: 10, 43, 47, anticipated by Henry and Walker 1967), does not really speak in favor of the pertinence of such a perspective.

Under the influence of historical efficacy (Braden 1985),⁴⁰ and under recourse to modern experiences of every day life, modern psychology and anthropology (expressed in Fitch and McElduff 2002) then follows the—failing—self-construction (a typical term of modernity), which falls short of the authentic self and therefore leads to self-destruction and the destruction of others.

A kind of positive counterpart (though of course the destructive element of endangerment and failure is not overlooked) is the interpretation by E.A. Schmidt (2004b) of Senecan tragedies as dramas of self-assurance, of self-concept and the self-assertion of the great individual rendering itself absolute (which explicitly comprises the political and philosophical, just as in Attic tragedy). With the necessary basic caution it is well applicable to *Medea* and enlightening to its understanding.

In Littlewood (2004) construction as method, variety of perspectives, and ambiguity are the basis of an interpretation of Seneca's dramas and dramatic characters. The Stoic-philosophical context emphatically returns, however. Medea speaks like a Stoic, albeit in combination with what we may call loss of world. That is a problem, which confronts not only the powerful (tyrannical) figures of the dramas, but also the all-powerful Stoic

⁴⁰ Added to that are cultural-historical, sociological, and political categories, which in Braden 1970 still stand completely in the foreground and explain the lack of communicative abilities in Seneca's ego-oriented characters. It is conspicuous how the overall understanding depends on how much the Stoic-moralist alternative is accentuated: triumph or defeat, that is the question here (cf., e.g., Abrahamsen 1993: 118).

sage (pre-formulated in Braden 1970: 39 f., comprehensive in Johnson 1988), especially when considering Seneca's isolationist Stoicism. Literature, here, is no longer a challenge to philosophy, as it is in Nussbaum, but almost a system-immanent destruction of philosophy.

Of course, political interpretation took hold of *Medea*. Disregarding specific historical points of reference, we are dealing here essentially with the problem of power seen from a moral perspective. If one finds "tyrannical traits" in Medea as a consequence of her power, then this reduction to the political immediately proves to be inadmissible. If, however, Creon is supposed to represent the tyrant or the system of power, then one can perhaps think of quasi-theoretical utterances, e.g., 178, 203–206, but here especially the audience will notice in frustration how little Creon meets these expectations.⁴¹

Who is Medea? Medea is dreadful, so that attempts to see positive figures in her antagonists Creon and Jason, are almost compelling. Medea, however, is at the same time "great"—with the result that Creon and Jason are "insignificant." Apart from rhetorical and intellectual brilliancy, it is power and might, absoluteness, and intensity of passions that fascinate, the depiction of which, according to Lessing's proposition (which can be founded on theoretical aesthetics and has been repeated many times), can not possibly leave our passions completely unstirred. The superhuman in its greatness—one can speak also of a "heroic temper"—, but also the inhuman with its terror are objects of fascination and admiration. "Border crossing," as such, is aesthetically attractive, even in crime (Dammann 2006: 97). This has little to do with a problem of identity, but even a recourse to a woman's demonic "liminality" does not convince—Medea will not do as "femme fatale" either.

It neither suffices to classify Medea simply as a witch usually identified with inhuman, superhuman, and divine. A comparison with the second part of Ovid's description of Medea in *met.* 7 is instructive, in which Medea appears as the perfect trouble-causing witch, of whom the narrator takes his

⁴¹ It is significant that with good reason one was able to consider the "pouvoir politique du roi, ou du tyran" as a central topic of Greek tragedy, which was modified by Euripides in his *Medea*: Fartzoff in Segal [et al.] 1996: 153–168. "Morale héroïque" in the service of "affirmation de soi" and "s'affirmer," all that shows, how basically problematic Seneca interpretation is, simultaneously, how little one can deal without comparison. Cf. also Boedeker in Clauss and Johnston 1997: 127–148, who with the title "Becoming Medea" (despite the occasional demarcation against Seneca) offers an analysis of the drama by Euripides, just as Seneca's *Medea* overall has been understood as a pure explanation of Euripides' ground work (Paduano in Némethi 2003).

leave and who simply vanishes from this world.⁴² Decisive in Seneca is the threat emanating from her, her integration into the world. Precisely therein could lie the reference to Seneca's own experience. One can see in his *Medea* an artistic coping mechanism, which could also explain the intertwining of mythical remoteness and Roman reality. Seneca's tragedies are part of that almost theatrical imperial occupation with myth⁴³—and simultaneously show its dark reverse. One will not fail to find therein not only Seneca's own ambivalences, as described by Miriam Griffin, but also the combination of admiration and damnation that was expressed by Maria Callas in the revival of the *Medea* opera by Cherubini (Paris 1797, resp. Milan 1809).

One should not dispute the importance Euripides's *Medea* had for Seneca; the influence of Ovid's *Medea* tragedy can hardly be assessed.⁴⁴ With regard to the reception of the *Medea* subject certainly Euripides, and especially the myth as such, dominate, the latter having been interpreted in the sense of political (imperialism, colonialism, oppression, revolution), ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts or in the sense of psychology and psychoanalysis (up to the *Medea* complex). It is revealing that the main period of the reception of Seneca's *Medea* is the baroque (the last pre-individual age, according to Helmut Heißenbüttel), the drama of which aims at world description and coming to terms with the world.⁴⁵ And if Antonin Artaud calls Seneca the greatest dramatist of history, then he has nothing individual in mind with regard to the cruelty he admires, but rather the forces of chaos, which are trans-subjective with regard to ritual. Conversely, one recalls archaic Hellenism, not Seneca, when it comes to psychologization, introspection, the exposure of the dark underground of the soul, and psychic realms of the extreme when dealing with human borderline experiences: e.g., in the case of the "Wiener Moderne" following in Nietzsche's, Jakob Burckhardt's, and Freud's wake. An interpretation of *Medea fiam* and *Medea nunc sum* as a search for identity and reclaiming the "I" in modern literature (already in Anouilh and Heiner Müller) would be a misunderstanding, were it an

⁴² Cf. Newlands in Clauss and Johnston 1997: 178–208.

⁴³ Cf., e.g., Champlin 2003: 94–111.

⁴⁴ For sources and reception of *Medea* (including the myth of *Medea*) see Beck 1998; Beck 2002; Bessone 1997; Block 1957; Braden 1985; Citti and Neri 2001; Corti 1998; Dammann 2006; Dionigi 1999; Eigler 2002; Feichtinger 1992; v. Fritz 1959; Gentili and Perusino 2000; Glaser 2001; Heinze 1997; Jakobi 1988; Kämmerer, Schuchard, and Speck 1998; Kerrigan 1996; Lefèvre 1978b; Martina 2000; Mimoso-Ruiz 1982; Moreau 1994; Most 2002; Nissim and Preda 2006; Segal [et al.] 1996; Share 1998; Tandoi 1992; Tschiedel 2005; Zwierlein 2004: I 337–384.

⁴⁵ Cf. Liebermann in Lefèvre 1978b: 385–424.

explanation of Seneca.⁴⁶ By contrast, Seneca belongs to the aesthetics of the sublime of the eighteenth century—and this is not to be reduced to a personality cult. Morality here is far removed.

Seneca certainly broke ground for a “freedom for Medea” (Ursula Haas and Rolf Liebermann) and a “rehabilitation” of Medea—not by eliminating or elucidating her deed, but by means of a repression or suspension of the moral moment: terms such as *scelus* and *nefas* are empty terms with him, as has been observed, no matter how often they are applied. The question remains, whether their vitalization suggests itself from a distance and hence from a suspension of the world of tragedy.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Tschiedel's (2005: 167) splendid take on this issue.

⁴⁷ Cf. *supra* p. 421.

PHAEDRA

Roland Mayer

Phaedra is one of Seneca's most engaging plays, both for scholars, who continue to find interesting things to say about it, and for dramatists, who have drawn inspiration from it down the ages. The dramatic action is more coherent than in some of the other plays (though it is not entirely seamless), the chorus is pretty well integrated into the action (in that it often announces arrivals and sometimes talks with the other characters; for a still more appreciative assessment, see Hill 2000: 563–574), and, above all, the divided soul of the protagonist, Phaedra, can successfully evoke the sympathy of audience or reader, particularly in the powerful scene (583–671) in which she reveals her love to Hippolytus (see Morelli 1995). It was arguably this quasi-incestuous attachment that kept the myth from being exploited by playwrights of the Republic; the more relaxed moral climate of the early Principate, and perhaps a carefully restricted target audience, enabled Seneca to take his chance with one of the greatest dramatic situations of the Attic stage. It is vastly to his credit that he met the challenge, if only fleetingly.

The date of this play's composition cannot be determined with precision, although the metrical analysis of Fitch (1981), which is generally followed, would place it among his earliest pieces, that is, late in Claudius's reign. This relative dating, if accepted, rules out any interpretations (for example, hints at Agrippina's alleged attempts to seduce her son) that would only work if the play could be dated to Nero's reign.

The drama's action is simple. In what is regarded as a lyric prologue, Hippolytus sets off on a hunt in Attica. Then Phaedra enters and deplores her current situation: her husband, Theseus, is away on an erotic escapade (91f.) and she herself suffers the symptoms of love, an inherited malady among Cretan women (see Armstrong 2006). Her old nurse tries to discourage her from giving in to this affliction; her speech is characteristic of minor figures whose good advice is neglected by the tragic protagonist. Phaedra replies, and she and the nurse engage in an increasingly urgent dialogue: they move from longish speech to crisper dialogue, which from 239–245 turns into sharp antilabe (i.e., each speaker takes part of a single line). Phaedra caves in to the nurse's pleas, but she resolves that only death will save her (254). This

is too much for the nurse, who, after failing to change Phaedra's intention, undertakes to tackle Hippolytus herself (271–273).

This ends the first act and a chorus of unidentified people sings of love's power, a theme, as usual in the tragedies, decorated with much mythology. The nurse then tells them that Phaedra is in the grip of passion, and the palace is opened to reveal an interior scene (if the play was performed). Phaedra is shown eager to change her elaborate court dress for something loose, more suited to the hunt. At the nurse's urging, she prays to Diana to bring Hippolytus under Venus's control. Her prayer seems to be answered, for there Hippolytus is, at prayer himself. Phaedra bids the nurse perform her task. After a polite exchange between them, the nurse tries to persuade Hippolytus to abandon his resistance to love. He replies with a justification of his own position. They move into a brief dialogue (565–582), when Phaedra bursts in upon them and promptly faints into Hippolytus's arms. He revives her and in a scene of unrivaled power in the Senecan tragic corpus, Phaedra confesses her love. Hippolytus is horrified and draws his sword on her (line 706). Her welcoming such a death deters him, and the nurse decides to turn the tables on him, and cries "rape!" Hippolytus runs away, leaving his sword behind with the nurse, who seeks to revive Phaedra.

The second act ends and the chorus comments on Hippolytus's flight, the dangers of such great beauty, and the deceit of the women; they announce the arrival of Theseus, which begins the third act. He has returned from the Underworld, and asks why his palace is given up to grief. The nurse cannot enlighten him, so he orders the palace to be opened up (this would be another interior scene in performance), and questions Phaedra. The pace of the dialogue becomes agitated (with some antilabe), and in answer to Theseus's request that she identify her assailant, Phaedra shows him the sword Hippolytus left behind: its device exposes him (and Phaedra avoids the lie direct). Theseus's tirade, in which he curses his son to death with one of the wishes promised him by his father Neptune, concludes the third act. The chorus, after singing a short ode on the power of fortune and the general unfairness of life, announces the arrival of the messenger, with which the fourth act begins.

He tells Theseus at once that Hippolytus is dead, and then embarks on a gruesome account of how he died. He concludes by saying that slaves are collecting the remains. Theseus is unexpectedly moved by the event, expressing sorrow that he has been the instrument of his son's death. The fourth act over, the chorus again sings briefly of fortune and announces that Phaedra, sword in hand, is shrieking from within the palace.

The last act begins with a question to her from Theseus. Phaedra replies in a speech in which she reproaches her husband for violent haste and exonerates

her stepson of her charge of rape. Finally she stabs herself, on stage apparently (1197–1198). Theseus rounds upon himself, and seems about to take his own life. The chorus recalls him to the business at hand, and Hippolytus's remains are brought in. Theseus tries to arrange them appropriately for burial. The action ends with his call for lament, for the recovery of his son's limbs, and the burial of Phaedra, whose spirit he curses.

In the account just given, no attempt has been made to determine precisely when or for how long characters (including Hippolytus's corpse) are present on stage, or why they enter or exit when they apparently do. Such questions raise problems, which Mayer (2002: 19–35) discusses.¹ There are other issues to consider, such as the interior scenes, and the alleged change of scene in 725 ff. (Kragelund 1999). The resolution of many of these issues depends upon whether an interpretation is founded upon the belief that the plays can be performed on stage (whether they were or not is less important), or whether they are deemed to be intended only for recitation or even reading.

The focuses of scholarly research on *Phaedra* have been three: the sources of the play, the characterization of the three principals, and the problematic issue of philosophical subtext.

SOURCES

That much Latin literature was generated by imitation of Greek models has long ceased to be a reproach on Roman originality. Studies of this play now rightly emphasize Seneca's adroit blending of Greek with classic Latin source material to produce an independent entity. The chief ingredients have long been acknowledged, namely three Athenian tragedies on this theme, two by Euripides and one by Sophocles, elements from which have been blended with features borrowed from the (lost) conclusion of Euripides's *Bacchae* (the grisly jigsaw of Hippolytus's remains), from Virgil's Dido, and more especially from Ovid's fourth "letter" from Phaedra to Hippolytus, in the collection entitled *Heroides*. Mayer (2002: 65–70) briefly sketches these issues. Since then, a debate about the priority and content of Euripides's Hippolytus plays has been vigorously pursued, especially in the light of the publication of a scrappy "hypothesis" to the lost play, the so-called *Kalyptomenos* ("Veiled").

The lines of argument have been fairly assessed by Zwierlein (2006: 9–24) who refers to a fuller account in his collected papers. He tentatively provides

¹ See now also Kohn 2013: 66–80. Unfortunately, Mayer 2002: 19–32 is not taken into account.

a hypothetical plot for the lost play (2006: 21 f.). If his reconstruction holds up, Seneca turns out to be a considerable innovator, chiefly in two scenes: first, where Phaedra personally tries to seduce Hippolytus, and second, where she, again personally, incriminates him (i.e., not by letter). It may be surmised that the character's "hands-on" approach owed more to the self-willed princesses of a Roman imperial court than to the behavior expected of Greek women, even in myth, but especially on the Athenian stage. Seneca, arguably, was not just in thrall to literary tradition, but owed something of his dramaturgy to the Roman society he knew so intimately. That said, the literary tradition was powerful, and Zwierlein (2006: 25–29) argues that Seneca owes more to Sophocles's no-longer-extant *Phaidra* than is generally supposed (a position he has held for some time).

Seneca's confidence in his audience's knowledge of the literary tradition discloses itself in the drama in a curious way: he tends to assume an acquaintance with the myth as known through literature rather than to make explicit statements of what is going on. For example, the speaker of the prologue is nowhere clearly identified as Hippolytus, and Phaedra never says at the outset that she loves him, although the trend of her affections is clear enough for the nurse to get the point by line 171.

CHARACTERIZATION

Since Mayer's discussion (2002: 51–63), fresh contributions have been made on this aspect of the play. Fitch and McElduff (2002: 32–35) see in Phaedra "a character who constructs multiple versions of herself—victim, slave, seductress, *matrona*—but cannot decide which version best suits or defines her." Littlewood's interpretation of Phaedra is cross-grained. He speaks of her despairing passivity and paralysis (2004: 301), although her hunting of Hippolytus might strike many as being far from a supine activity. It may be that Littlewood finds her in thrall to her literary heritage (2004: 259 f.), a position also endorsed by Armstrong (2006: 278–298), who provides an ample reading of Phaedra's role in the drama, in which she rightly emphasizes the importance of literary tradition in the representation of character.

Here is where source criticism still has its uses: as we saw above, Seneca's *Phaedra* owes rather less as a drama to his models than is often supposed, and that makes his characterization more independent as well. Gill (2006: 425–427) offers a particularly subtle reading of Phaedra's characterization; she undergoes psychic disintegration, evidenced by her self-awareness that her passion for Hippolytus is wrong, but all the time she is distressed that

she cannot honor the claims of modesty (*pudor*). He finds (2006: 428) that she engages with her passion more fully than does the Phaidra of Euripides, and her prolonged internal conflict reflects a substantively new conception of her character. Wray's (forthcoming) contribution to this discussion should be substantial.

The character of Hippolytus secures a sympathetic analysis by Hine (2004: 194–198), who detects conflicting elements in Seneca's presentation of it: his pathological hatred of women as sexual creatures is offset by his carefree energy and the fearlessness with which he faces death. Littlewood (2004: 260–272, 274–280, 284–301), too, engages with Hippolytus's character, rather more than with Phaedra's, but again his emphasis on the trammels of literary tradition may seem overdone. In this case, dramatic treatment was itself bound to the basic myth, and Hippolytus's fate was pre-determined long before he entered drama or literature more generally. This is actually a point made in his own defence by Aristophanes's "Euripides" in *Frogs* 1052: charged by "Aeschylus" with putting shabby sexual subjects on stage, "Euripides" is made to ask if the tales were untrue, whether he had made them up. The contemporary notion of over-determination is absolutely fair: myth, which may predate literary treatment, can be as much of a determining factor as poetic tradition.

Theseus attracts the least attention, but we may note the Romanization of his character: unlike Euripides's Theseus, he grieves for the son he has killed. This produces something of the complexity we find in Hippolytus, which offsets the unthinking brutality shown in the curse he cast on his son without establishing the truth of the charge against him.

PHILOSOPHICAL READING

Seneca was a professed Stoic, and most—but not all—of his extant writing bears a philosophical stamp. It is not therefore unreasonable to imagine that some of this philosophical interest will crop up more or less prominently in the tragedies, a serious literary form with a strong moral undercurrent. Such an assumption gains in plausibility in *Phaedra*, where there is repeated reference to the concept of *natura*, an important Stoic theme (see Boyle 1985 and Critelli 1999). The problem is that there seems to be little or no consistency of doctrinal input (see Mayer 2002: 90–92). One route out of this impasse is to endorse plural readings, Armisen-Marchetti's strategy (1992), ranging from a "strong" Stoic through a generalized "philosophical" to a weak "moral commonplaces" line.

Hine (2004) provides the most balanced account of all the approaches to this particular issue and the problems they entail. He also offers a deliberately cross-grained interpretation of Phaedra along Epicurean lines (2004: 178–185). This is done in a light-hearted spirit, but the important point is made (2004: 186 f.) that authorial intention is hard to establish, and that any philosophical interpretation, including the Stoic, which Hine also sets out (2004: 185–201), should be regarded as a diagnosis along particular philosophical (or non-philosophical) lines. Gill (2006: 422) declines to offer a totalizing interpretation of the play in Stoic terms; still his analysis of Phaedra's characterization, referred to above, as an embodiment of Chrysippus's thinking about passion as internal conflict is persuasive (2006: 431 and 432 f.). In his view, it has implications for wider interpretation: he maintains (2006: 423 and 435) that Seneca's representation of a paradigm of psychological disintegration would support the Stoic view that passion is a form of psychic sickness or mental disorder: the audience would hardly identify with this, but would in fact carry away a salutary lesson. On the other hand, even an audience without benefit of Stoic training could see that Phaedra ruins not just herself, but the man she loves and her husband; she condemns herself (1176–1178), and it does not require a Stoic understanding of her divided character to see that her passion was destructive. The psychic division goes some way to securing our sympathy for her plight, but it does not require philosophical endorsement to be a credible human condition.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Seneca's tragic style in general owes much to Ovid for its smoothness and pointedness, although his acquaintance with classic Latin literature is everywhere manifested in his phraseology. Seneca shows his allegiance to the mainstream Roman poetic tradition with his displays of learnedness. An example is the geographical *doctrina* found in Hippolytus's prologue, in which some very obscure localities in Attica are named (he is the first writer to refer to Parnethus, Phyle, and Thria). By the same token, he likes teasing mythological allusions, such as the statement that Minos was a "mild father" toward Ariadne (245). Further examples can be found in Mayer (1990).

The influence of rhetoric, too, especially of declamation and *sententia*, is pervasive (see Mayer 2002: 71–73). The nurse's plea to Hippolytus, for example, is a *suasoria*, a speech of persuasion, which relies heavily on the concept of nature and natural actions, themes dear to the young hunter's heart. Hippolytus's reply takes the form of an encomium of the Golden Age that

evolves into an attack upon womankind; both parts of his long speech equally smack of the rhetorical exercise. When the nurse tries to deter Phaedra from pursuing her erotic course, she deploys *sententiae* aplenty to bolster her arguments against giving in to lust (for these and many others, see Smith 1885: 31–41). These stylistic features are probably still something of a stumbling block for contemporary readers, but they are so similar to what we find in the philosophical works, where Seneca's seriousness of intention cannot be doubted, that it must be assumed that he deemed them appropriate to tragic style as well.

TRANSMISSION

The transmission of the text of the tragedies is discussed above. One feature of that transmission is that the two branches of which it consists give some plays, including ours, different titles. The *A*-class calls it *Hippolytus*, whereas the currently accepted title, *Phaedra*, is owed to the so-called Etruscus MS (*E*) and to MSS derived from it. The quotation of line 710 by the late Roman grammarian Priscian confirms the latter title of the play. This should be borne in mind, because for some centuries the play was read in and printed from MSS belonging to the *A*-class, hence the common title was *Hippolytus*, and during the Renaissance unspecific references to the performance of a play so entitled should not be taken as evidence for the performance of Euripides's play; it is quite possible that the Senecan play was meant. The title *Phaedra*, which was at least acknowledged by earlier editors such as Delrio and Lipsius, only caught on after Jan Frederik Gronovius's edition of the tragedies (Amsterdam 1682) demonstrated the general superiority of *E*.

RECEPTION

The reception of *Phaedra* is fully discussed by Mayer (2002: 75–87). In antiquity Seneca's plays were not school texts, nor does it seem that they even made it into the "canon" of classical authors. Still, they were read, and Prudentius and Boethius both borrow from *Phaedra*. The tragedies gained a more active following in the early Renaissance, and *Phaedra* achieved the remarkable distinction of being the first ancient tragedy to be performed in the modern era, in Rome in 1486 (see Mayer 2002: 99 f.). More performances are subsequently recorded, and translations into modern vernaculars began to appear. But the Renaissance was marked by the recovery of Greek, and comparisons of Seneca's plays with his "models" were often detrimental to his

reputation. Still, some playwrights knew a good thing when they saw it, and when Racine decided to put the ancient story of Phaedra's love on the French stage he found himself owing a good deal to Seneca, loathe though he was to admit it (see Mayer 2002: 79–83 and Zwierlein 2006: 29–36). The crucial point seems to be that Seneca showed Racine how the action might dispense with divine intervention, so important in Euripides's version. Zwierlein (2006: 50–52) scouts the common view that Racine's treatment owes something to his Jansenist leanings.

The developing scholarly reassessment, in the second half of the twentieth century, of Seneca's tragic sensibility bore fruit on the stage, too. The Flemish-language playwright, Hugo Claus, and the English Sara Kane both revised *Phaedra* (Kane very radically indeed) for contemporary production (see Mayer 2002: 84–87).

OEDIPUS

Karlheinz Töchterle

DATE

As with all of Seneca's tragedies, *Oedipus* cannot be precisely dated. Apart from the usual references used for dating the work, the following arguments can be employed, in which the tragedian is assumed to be identical with the philosopher (note scepticism recently expressed by Kohn 2003).

1. The polymetrics in the second and third choral song are based on the derivational theory found in a treatise on meter by Caesius Bassus, which can probably be attributed to Nero's reign. The theory was admittedly known prior to that date.
2. Among the prose works, it is most closely related to *De providentia* and *De tranquillitate animi*. Both dialogues are attributed to the later Seneca.
3. The linguistic similarities to *Naturales quaestiones* are also conspicuous, dating from the last years of Seneca's life. These can be explained, in part, by their common theme (e.g., cosmic sympathy).

These arguments suggest an origin in the latter phase of Seneca's life (i.e., close to the other tragedies, as is now also suggested by Boyle 2006: 189 f.). Arguments for other datings are much weaker: Fitch's attempt (1981) to place the tragedies in a chronological order based on metric principles, which would place *Oedipus* together with *Ag.* and *Phaedr.* in an early phase of Seneca's career, is cast in doubt by his spurious assumptions (cf. Töchterle 1994: 46). A similar argument is to be applied to datings based on political allusions. Bishop (1977/78, 1985) and Lefèvre (1985a), in particular, read it as written in opposition to Nero's rule. Even if this corresponds to the dating suggested above, such interpretations are to be considered highly speculative (cf. Malaspina 2004: 293 n. 82, who uses the comparison between Nero and Oedipus reported by historians to draw the conclusion that authorship or publication after AD 59 might have been risky).

CONTENT

The play begins with Oedipus' monologue. He complains about the plague in Thebes, and about the treacherous nature of the kingdom bestowed upon him after his flight from Corinth. He fears the fulfilment of the prophecy made by the Delphic Oracle: that he is to kill his father and marry his mother. This prophecy has driven him out of Corinth, away from his "parents" Polybus and Merope. But now Apollo stigmatizes him by sparing him alone from the plague. This plague is the object of a detailed description. In view of the suffering, Oedipus seeks a quick death, and then considers flight back to his parents in Corinth, if need be. This is the cue for Iocasta, who appeals to his male courage. He responds by recalling his courage before the Sphinx, which he now considers the reason for the plague. He expects salvation only from Apollo, while the dispatch of Creon to Delphi is hinted at.

The first choral song adopts the lament about the plague and extends it: Bacchus is addressed, under whose rule Thebes' glory extended to India. Now not even its seven gates suffice to cope with the funeral corteges. First, the plague attacks animals and nature, mixing the ominous with the infernal. The symptoms of the lethal disease are described, the diseased begging for death at the foot of the temples.

The second act begins with a dialogue between Oedipus and Creon, which reports the result of consulting the oracle. The murder of Laius demands revenge and the *profugus hospes* responsible for this crime should be chased out of town. Oedipus does not relate this verdict to himself and thus immediately begins his search for the murderer. In a lengthy speech full of ironic allusions to himself, Oedipus demonstrates his resolve to avenge the crime. Finally, he asks Creon about the location of the deed. In response, the latter describes a fork in the path, but before Oedipus can respond, the blind seer Tiresias appears, led by his daughter, and is asked for explanation. The seer, weakened by age, announces a divination by reading entrails. Yet, Tiresias cannot name the murderer. An invocation of the dead Laius is supposed to bring final clarification: Creon is supposed to act as its witness. The act concludes with the seer's request to the chorus to sing a eulogy to Bacchus.

The second choral song consists of the hymn to Bacchus. First, Bacchus is called upon and requested to come, and a description of his luminous mystic feminine figure is woven into this invocation. It is followed by a description of his entourage, his realms of power, and his heroic deeds, culminating in the celestial wedding with Ariadne. The conclusion is formed by a vow of unending admiration, guaranteed by the immutability of the cosmic cycles.

The main content of the third act is the report on Creon's invocation of the dead. The report is framed by two arguments. The first arises from a conflict between Creon's hesitancy to disclose the results of the invocation and the King's desire to know—to which Creon, after an assurance of impunity, finally gives in. He first reports on the scene of the invocation, of the rites and their success, the bursting open of the earth and the first glance into the deep, making the Spartes, Erinyes, and various evils appear. In response to the fearless seer's next call the dead souls swoop in. Then the Theban penitent, and, finally, Laius appear, whose speech is given word by word and forms the end of the report. He accuses the King of his murder, that of the King's father, and of incest and calls upon the citizens of Thebes to expel him to let the city recover. Oedipus reacts with disbelief and accuses Creon of planning to oust him with the seer's aid. After this quarrel he has him incarcerated.

In the third song, the chorus sides with the King and makes the anger of the gods responsible for the plague and the fate of the descendants of Labdacus (to whom they do not count Oedipus). As proof and example, the chorus cites the arrival of Cadmus in Thebes in search of Europa, the Dragon, the Spartes, and Actaeon, the grandson of Cadmus, who was turned into a stag.

The fourth act climaxes in anagnorisis. Ignoring the chorus' opinion, the brooding Oedipus remembers that he committed manslaughter at the bifurcation of the path near Phokis and asks Iocasta for details about Laius at the time of his death. These make him suspect himself, but just as he learns the time of the crime, he is interrupted by a messenger from Corinth, who keeps him from drawing his final conclusions. The messenger reports that King Polybus has died a natural death. Oedipus is relieved, but still fears the second half of the oracle prophesying incest with his mother, to which the messenger responds by mentioning the false pregnancy of Merope: he himself handed the King to his parents as a foundling. Oedipus immediately sends out in search of the Theban shepherd, from whom the Corinthian received him as a child. Iocasta, who has become wary, wants to dissuade her husband from further investigations, but by that time the old shepherd Phorbas has already been found. On threat of torture he provides the essential piece of information. Oedipus responds with a death wish and dashes into the palace to his wife and mother.

The fourth choral song praises the golden mean between the extremes in appropriate iconographic meter (see below) and provides the mythical example of Daedalus.

The fifth act opens with the messenger's report about Oedipus's act of blinding himself. The chorus reacts by proclaiming the inescapable power of

fate. The blinded Oedipus enters the stage and reflects his deed, while the chorus announces the appearance of Iocasta, who has a final conversation with her son and husband and then stabs herself with a sword. When the chorus relates this to the blinded Oedipus, he accuses himself of matricide and announces his departure from Thebes. The plague will accompany him.

PROBLEMS/TOPICS/RESEARCH

The summary presented here is based on the classic five-act interpretation of the play. This can only be argued, when one ignores the separate function of the final chorus (980–997), citing the following points:

1. Quantity: Both the preceding report by the messenger and the final scene are not substantial enough for an act in its own right. To this it must be added that the song in question is very short for a pause between the acts.
2. Dramatic structure and staging: The chorus' songs that frame the messenger's report are thematically closely related and are composed with each other in mind. The chorus remains on stage in the fifth act, takes part in the events, and acts as a counterpart to and commentator on the events the blind Oedipus can no longer see.
3. Parallels: The chorus acts, though in a lesser form, like the Sophoclean one in the *kommos* to *Oedipus Rex*; the chorus is also similar to that of the Senecan *Phaedra*, which remains on stage after its last short song (*Phaedr.* 1123–1155) and bemoans the dismemberment of Hippolytus in a dialogue with Theseus. In *Ag.* 664–692 the chorus sings in anapaestic meter in a complaint with Cassandra. The author of the *Herc. O.* elaborated on this tendency in his “quasi-*kommos*” in verse 1131–1289 (Tarrant 1976: 295 n. 1).

From the comments made so far we can assume that the actual staging is to be seen as the genuine medium of the play. Possible doubts are to be attributed to the decline of Seneca's tragedies in the Graecomania of German New Humanism (as illustrated by A.W. Schlegel, cf. Töchterle 1997: 133), but find a new champion in Zwierlein (1966) and some significant followers (e.g., Kugelmeier 2007). As to the general discussion, it is the author's intention that is decisive. He would only not have thought of staging the play if he had not considered it feasible at that time. Contemporary staging practice proves the contrary. He lived in a theater-mad era, and Nero was its Archegetes (cf. Dupont 1985, Töchterle 1994: 40 f.).

With reference to Zwierlein's method, in particular as regards *Oedipus*, one can ask whether there is something in it that cannot be performed, and, on the other hand, one can adopt the position of those who champion the idea that the play was intended to be performed on stage (in particular Braun 1982, cf. also Rozelaar 1976, Sutton 1986, Boyle 2006: 192 f., Gahan 1998, Kragelund 1999, and Kragelund 2005 on *Octavia*) and ask whether there are passages that are difficult or impossible to understand if not performed on stage.

There is nothing that cannot be staged. Problems of *extispicium* can be avoided via *teichoscopy*, well motivated by the blind seer and his helpful daughter, but the staging of a common Roman practice would not have presented any problems (cf. Sutton 1986: 22 f., 53 f.; Hollingsworth 2001: 140 f., Rosenmeyer 1993). The same argument applies to Iocasta's suicide: again, *teichoscopy* is possible here and well motivated by the blind Oedipus, or a presentation on stage, perhaps with the necessary props (cf. Töchterle 1994: 39). Without staging, the *anagnorisis* is difficult to follow: Sophocles achieved the *anagnorisis* by giving the two subsidiary characters, the messenger from Corinth and the Theban witness to the murder of Laios, an additional function. Both were involved in handing over the foundling. In Seneca's drama this double function is discarded in the case of the Theban. He is not witness to the crime, but is questioned as the person who brought the foundling to its foster parents. This is why he has to be informed by the Corinthian messenger, the only one to know that the identity of the present King is the same as that of the onetime foundling. This message, however, is never explicitly delivered in the text of the drama. It is therefore plausible to assume that the Corinthians' wish in verse 855 is accompanied by a gesture made toward the King (*procul sit omen, vivit et vivat precor*) that makes this identity clear to the Theban and the audience (cf. Töchterle 1997: 135 f., the criticism raised by Schröder 2000: 88 f. remains unconvincing).

Although of secondary importance, we might consider the external hints at a staging of the play found on Roman murals (cf. Croisille 1982: 163 f.): one found in Palermo depicting an older man who could represent the Corinthian messenger, but particularly one found in Pompeii dating from Vespasian's rule, where a blinded individual turns to a woman wearing a tragic mask, who turns her face away from the awful sight. This could represent the confrontation of the royal couple at the end of the drama, which is only to be found in Seneca (the picture has now been lost and is only documented in earlier photographs, which is why this piece of evidence has to be viewed with some scepticism, cf. Strocka 2000).

Finally, metatheatrical aspects would seem to support the staging theory. These are conspicuous particularly toward the end of *Tro*. (cf. Boyle 1994),

but can also be found in *Oedipus* (cf. Boyle 2006: 209 f. and note 63 with earlier literature), in particular in the epicleses of the chorus to the god of the theater, Bacchus (110 f. and in the second chorus, 403–508).

The question as to the Stoic leanings of the plays has often been asked (most recently, Hine 2004, Wiener 2006: 103 f., citing older literature). In *Oedipus*, this issue is inextricably linked to the question of guilt and fate, which is still in doubt in the Sophoclean precursor. In contrast, the opening scenes are dominated by fear of fate, making Oedipus deplore his fate and consider exile. When this fate makes an increasing impression upon him in the mantic scenes, he turns tyrannical, and following anagnorisis he reacts emotionally with *ira* and *furor* and the attempt to outdo it by the *mors longa* of blinding. The fate met by Oedipus is hard to confront with Stoic calm, yet Hercules shows a Stoic reaction in the play by the same name. He cannot, however, be held morally responsible (unconvincingly, Davis 1991, Szekeres 2000). Like other tragic figures by Seneca, such as Medea or Phaedra, Oedipus does not behave according to Stoic wisdom, although his acts are described by the chorus in Stoic terms (cf. Caviglia 1996), and his behavior is explained through the Stoic psychology of emotions. Even secondary motives (divination, *sympatheia*, *oikeiosis*) and individual *sententiae* and *praecepta* find their parallels in Seneca's prose. Perhaps one should speak of "reduced Stoicism" as suggested by Liebermann (2004).

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Seneca's poetic diction clearly stands in the Augustan tradition, particularly that of Virgil and Ovid, and, in the choruses, also that of Horace. The stylistic genre, which we only know in parts and from the Republican period, also has influence. This is particularly unusual for Seneca, who can otherwise be considered a modernist. This categorization applies particularly to his prose, the style of which, however, as has been long established, is close to that of the tragedies. Common characteristics are a preference for parataxis and thus asyndesis ("staccato style"), pathos and hyperbole (the *maiùs solito* detailed by Seidensticker 2002: 115 f. is reflected on the stylistic level), sentence, point, antithesis, redundancy, and fanning, this in a paradoxical contrast to succinctness, brevity, and plain wording. There are special features to be added, like hypallage (cf. Hillen 1989), play upon sounds (cf. Töchterle 1994: 35), and a wealth of interrelations that is even reflected in the choice of words. This declamatory style was previously denounced as rhetorical, while today

it is viewed in positive terms as appropriate to the genus and times (cf. Boyle 2006: 193 f.). The closeness to the stylistic ideal of *De sublimitate* (cf. Töchterle 1994: 34, 38) would have to be investigated in greater detail.

The general comments on language are reflected in the meter. Both the spoken verse of the iambic trimeter and the lyrical measures are strictly adhered to (cf. Luque Moreno 2004b, with older literature). The author frequently uses other possible variations to enhance his message. His significant role within Latin meter (his evident influence on Boethius) is frequently underestimated. The specific features of *Oedipus* are admittedly the polymetrics, in the choral songs two and three (405–415, 472–502, 710–737), which it shares with *Agamemnon* (589–637, 808–866). They rest on the derivational theory, as brought to us by the most recent contemporary Caesius Bassus (Gramm. Lat. Keil 6.255–272). In Seneca's poetic practice this theory is expressed in such a way that Horatian measures, in particular, are separated into cola, rearranged, and, in some cases, extended or reduced. There is still the problem of correct colometrics and—in case of a staging—their setting to music. While in the first instance we can observe a *communis opinio* forming, the second question is rarely posed.

The second characteristic is the conspicuous variation of the stichic glyconic meter of the fourth chorus (882–910). Of the thirty-three verses about twenty show a longum instead of a double brevis, and furthermore Seneca chooses not a spondaic, but a trochaic basis. Based on the technical explanation provided by Steinmetz (1970), we could perceive the meter as a formal counterpart to the choral message of the golden mean, as it represents an exactly symmetrical form with an emphasis on its center through the weighty longum (cf. Töchterle 1994: 556 f.).

TRANSMISSION

With few exceptions, the transmission of *Oedipus* lies in the general context of the tradition of Seneca's tragedies (cf. Zwierlein 1983, Billerbeck 1999: 39 f.). The most significant exception is provided by a palimpsest in the Ambrosiana (Ambr. G 82 sup.), dating from the fifth century, which apart from verses taken from *Med.* also contains the verses 395–432 and 508–545 (with a confusion of 532 and 533) from *Oed.* Up to now this has resisted a conclusive placement in the stemma. Older than the manuscripts of the *E* and *A* versions are the *excerpta Thuanea* from Paris (Paris lat. 8071), dating from the second quarter of the ninth century, which contain passages taken from the first and the second chorus (cf. Zwierlein 1983: 15 f.). Also, preceding

the Etruscus (11th century) and the anchor manuscripts of the *A* version, we find the quotations provided by Eugenius Vulgarius taken from *Oedipus* (cf. Schmidt 1978: 62 f.).

SOURCES

The most important source available to us is *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. The sceptical attitude toward the Attic tragedians as a source of Seneca's tragedies (cf. Tarrant 1978) may be appropriate when considering other plays, but here the case is clear: both plays have essentially the same plot, begin with the plague in Thebes as the instigating event, and end in the suicide of Iocasta and the blinding of the protagonist. Also, anagnorisis is achieved by the confrontation of two secondary figures in a similar way. To this, much detailed agreement is to be added: the despatch of Creon to Delphi, the information gained there, and the banishment of the perpetrator by the King, which is at the same time a curse on himself. Furthermore, the accusation of a plot against the seer and against Creon as well as his defense take a similar form. Similarly, Seneca has based the queen's dreading of disaster and her providing the voice of admonition on Sophocles's version. There are some differences in the sequence of dramatic events, but also in those leading up to the drama. In accordance with other representatives of the mythographic tradition, without these necessarily being cited as "sources" (cf. Töchterle 1994: 9 f.), it is the final scene that differs significantly from Sophocles', in which both malefactors meet again and Iocasta stabs herself with Oedipus' sword. Iocasta's suicide by the sword is also to be found in other myths (cf. Euripides, *Phoen.* 1455 f.), the abdominal goal of the lethal stab being significant, conspicuous in its parallel to the reports of the murder of Agrippina (cf. Töchterle 1994: 631).

Sophocles' play should, however, be seen not only as source but also as a foil, on which Seneca's Oedipus tragedy is projected; the very different protagonist driven by his fear of fate of the early phases obviously recalls the earlier play. Seneca's Oedipus has also "read Sophocles' *Oedipus*" (in order to create a variation on the famous comment on Seneca's *Medea* by Wilamowitz). Against this background, Seneca's deviations (cf. in particular Thummer 1972) gain a particular significance and profile.

Similarly, further precursors to various passages must be seen as intertextual rather than as sources (cf. Schiesaro 1997a): the description of the plague in the prologue, for example, and the chorus' first song, where Seneca clearly emulates Lucretius 6.1138–1286, Virgil, *georg.* 3.478–566, Ovid, *met.* 7.523–613, and Manilius 1.874–895.

RECEPTION

The Nachleben of Seneca's tragedies begins with the imitations of *Herc. O.* and *Octavia*, where, in particular, the former shows clear traces of *Oedipus*, followed by Lucan, Silius, Statius, and even Tertullian. Echoes of the play can also be found in the literature of late antiquity (Prudentius, Claudian, and Boethius) and—only occasionally—that of the Middle Ages (Schmidt 1978). Within the framework of the general reception of Seneca's tragedies, *Oedipus* further loses significance. After Sophocles' tragedy became known in the West the reception of Seneca's play is hard to determine. The appearance of the ghost of Laius and the mode of self-blinding in Corneille's *Oedipe* (1659) can be attributed to it. The appearance of the ghost is also found in Platen's *Der romantische Oedipus* (1829) and Cocteau's *La machine infernale* (1932). In his libretto for Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1927), the translator into Latin, Jean Daniélou, occasionally uses Seneca's diction.

From New Humanism onward, the Greek model of tragedy begins to overshadow the Latin play completely. This is particularly true of modern staging, which only rarely uses Seneca's text. Amoroso (1993b) counts six modern performances of *Oedipus*.

The history of the play's reception is placed within the wider frame of the history of the theme, which is not restricted to the literary aspect of the myth and would have to be complemented by a history of the motif (based on global research): the motifs of incest, patricide, and the scapegoat, for example. This task has yet to be undertaken.

AGAMEMNON*

Christoph Kugelmeier

Seneca's *Agamemnon* is, following the now generally accepted relative chronology of Fitch (1981), which is constructed on solid and primarily metrical criteria, one of the poet's earlier works. There is controversy as to whether the drama is based on Aeschylus's play of the same name; there are different assignments of emphasis, to say nothing of the differing formal patterns, which, as we shall explain later, are part of what gives Senecan theatre its uniqueness.¹

The prologue of *Agamemnon* is spoken by the shade of Thyestes. In sonorous language he evokes the fate of the house of the Pelopides, which embodies the eerily precipitous combination of noble splendor and the most shocking of all humanly imaginable crimes. With epigrammatic brevity, typical of Seneca's style, the sketch of the fateful place is summarized in v. 11: *locus hic habendae curiae—hic epulis locus*. Equally characteristic is the tendency one observes in the following verses: Thyestes asks himself (just as Tantalus does in the prologue of the *Thyestes*) whether it would not be better to return to the place of his torment, the underworld, rather than be a witness to the inevitable. The underworld is evoked via the examples of the famous penitents; Seneca omits none of the famous *exempla*, which gives the impression of a certain redundancy. This is a basic trait of the Senecan style, as can easily be seen by comparing, for example, the detailed report by Eurybates in the same play. Seneca's descriptions obviously aspire to create a picture that is—in an almost “baroque” manner—as dense and internally complete as possible. He has less concern for a tight plot.

In the third part of the prologue, too, Seneca leaves his poetic “calling card”: Thyestes, in unsettling self-analysis, questions himself as to his own share of the responsibility for the fate of his family and then he himself

* I am grateful to Dr. Robert Spence (Saarbrücken) for the translation.

¹ An overview of possible connections with earlier works is given by Corsaro 1978–1979: 301–310. Stackmann 1950 attempts to demonstrate a heavier dependence on Roman Republican tragedy; in this direction also Mette 1964: 183 f., Dingel 1985: 1063 and Perutelli 1995: 5 f. On the other hand Calder 1976a: 336 (referring to older literature) and Marcucci 1996 assume Aeschylus as the immediate model. A different argument is given by Tarrant 1976: 8–18, who strongly denies a direct dependence on Aeschylus.

provides the answer in the reference to the gruesome meal (25–27). This pathetic *maius solito* of affect and crime is a basic motif in Seneca's character portrayals.² It endows his main characters with their superhuman greatness, thus heightening the pathos of their downfall in an extraordinarily striking way. Thyestes is not sparing in keywords that clearly portray the fateful (*coacta fatis*: 33), criminal involvement of his family, an involvement which, in his view, culminates in his person, in the *cena Thyestea*: the term *nefas* and related forms appear all of three times in this passage (30, 31 and 35); indeed, nature itself is—in the truest sense of the word—"perverted" by the deeds of the Pelopides (*versa natura est retro*: 34).

In v. 57 the chorus appears, as abruptly as usual in Seneca's dramas. Thyestes makes no reference at all to its appearance (his own exit is completely unexplained), while Clytemnestra, too, is abruptly on stage with her soliloquy from v. 108 onward and displays no reaction whatsoever to any of the others present. Embedding the chorus in the surrounding action presents the usual difficulties. In terms of content, the ode contains several references to the theme of the action: at the beginning (57–59), for example, the idea of the illusory *fortuna* of those of noble birth and the remarks on the breach of marital fidelity (79–81) with which Clytemnestra's lament (110–115) may be compared, on the murder (81f.), and on the vengeance exacted for it (83). Most of this, however, is formulated in general ideas, which are often found in Seneca (on the first motif cf. *Phaedr.* 1123–1127; on marital infidelity cf. *Phaedr.* 987).

The treatment of the chorus in *Agamemnon* is subsumed under the overall problem of the chorus in Seneca: the unclear identity and the loose, if any, integration of the choral songs into the action is everywhere observable. It is also unclear why the chorus appears for the second ode (310 ff.), and the praise of Hercules sung by the chorus in 808–866 is unmotivated by what precedes it. After the abrupt end of this song, the chorus falls into total oblivion; while Cassandra is describing the climax of the drama, the murder scene inside the palace (867–909), she makes not a single reference to the chorus and there is no reaction at all on its part to the events, as one would expect of a chorus of Argive citizens involved in the action. Here again, it seems that the chorus is no longer present at all.

A special feature of *Agamemnon* is that it has a second chorus: in 586–588 a *turba tristis* of captive Trojan women is announced, who together with Cassandra precede Agamemnon's triumphal entry. This second chorus is not only referred to by Clytemnestra in 586–588, it also defines its identity itself

² See Seidensticker 1985.

in 611 f. This chorus participates thus, but also through the alternating song with Cassandra, to a greater degree in the action than is usually the case with Seneca. But with the announcement of the victorious Agamemnon in 778 f. the chorus of the Argives, which had been silent all this time, suddenly asserts its right to speak, for *en deos tandem suos / victrice lauru cinctus Agamemnon adit* of course does not belong in the mouths of the Trojan women, as is shown by the positive *tandem*. How one should best imagine the side-by-side presence of two choruses on the stage remains unclear.³

The views as to who in fact is the “main character” of the play, or whether there is any candidate at all for that role among the cast of characters, diverge widely.⁴ There is general agreement that, if for no other reason than the brevity of his appearance, it cannot be Agamemnon any more than in Aeschylus’s work. Some interpreters rightly emphasize the important role of Clytemnestra.⁵ She is at the center of the author’s psychological interest in two enthralling scenes in the first part of the drama (108–309), where he uses her to show the oscillation between the most varied mental urges in the face of the decision to commit the bloody deed that overthrows everything or, to put it stoically, the destruction of rational insight by the emotions of anger and hatred. But we must also not forget the character to whom she is inseparably bound, her lover Aegisthus.⁶ At the end both appear together as the embodiment of arbitrary tyranny that has broken through the barriers of reason and morality. In the second half of the play, however, one has the impression that Clytemnestra’s role is diminishing: not even her presence on stage can be established with certainty.⁷ It is presumably no coincidence that her withdrawal coincides with the appearance of Cassandra from 586 onward, and in fact the Trojan princess acquires decisive significance in the further course of things. Her character not only stands out from and contrasts with all the other characters, it also is what advances the action in the first place, or indeed first makes the audience conscious of what is happening.

With vv. 388–391 the long-awaited return of the Greek fleet finally occurs. The chorus announces a character named Eurybates, who is said to be a “precursor” and messenger. His description of the perilous return of the Greek

³ Kugelmeier 2007: 162–165 (on the problems with the choruses in general see 148–167).

⁴ Disputed by Tarrant 1976: 3 f. and by Motto and Clark 1985b.

⁵ Giomini 1956: 7 and Croisille 1964; see also Streubel 1963: 236 f.

⁶ Riemer 1997 (see especially 138 f. and 146–149), with extensive discussion of the relevant research; Kugelmeier 2007: 56–61.

⁷ Kugelmeier 2007: 78 f. and 192–194.

army from Troy (421–578) takes up almost the entire space between the second and the third choral song, an extraordinarily long messenger's report even for Seneca. It is conspicuous that this long interruption occurs precisely at this decisive turning point in the drama. Scarcely has the long-awaited Agamemnon landed and the moment for the conspirators to act arrived, when Clytemnestra enquires in 419 f. as to the condition of the Greek fleet, although her previous enquiry—the only one expected of a (supposedly) concerned spouse, the question as to the whereabouts of her husband—has already brought positive news (396). Thereupon Eurybates begins his narrative of the events that followed the departure for Troy. One must indeed call it a narrative, as the interruption to the dramatic flow at precisely this point is clearly noticeable. In itself, however, the narrative contains a great deal of drama, which is evoked by the spoken word: the listener becomes a veritable witness to the raging elements and the mortal danger that confronted Agamemnon and the other Greeks. It seems as though Seneca were narrating here for the sake of this effect on the listener; just as he so often does with the characters, here he blots out the main action and has the listener enter a second level of action, on which the reporter functions like an epic narrator.⁸

Eurybates's report also fulfils a further purpose, which only gradually becomes apparent in the broader context of the drama, rather than immediately in the narrower context of the scene. The storm, which has obviously been imposed by the gods as a punishment for the outrages committed by the Greeks in the war for Troy, can be interpreted as a "storm of fate," a violent measure of atonement, with which the world order restores the disturbed harmony. Thus, for example, the fate of Ajax, one of the most prominent committers of outrages in the Trojan legend, appears as a prefiguration of Agamemnon, who is also embroiled in *hybris* (532–556),⁹ and Agamemnon himself envies the dead Priam (514), a connection between the two kings that will play a fatal part in the final section.¹⁰

With great pathos Agamemnon greets the soil of his homeland (782–791); the boastful emphasis on the rich booty brought from the "land of the barbarians" is annoying.

The crucial significance of the short dialogue between Cassandra and Agamemnon (786–801) is shown by the fact that central motifs of Seneca's

⁸ Kugelmeier 2007: 118 f. and 233–239.

⁹ Streubel 1963: 220, Lefèvre 1973: 82.

¹⁰ The parallelism between Troy and Mycene / Argos, ever significant in the play, is investigated by Lohikoski 1966.

thinking on death as freedom and the fate of Troy as a warning against ὕβρις give it a depth of meaning that extends beyond the concrete subject matter of the play, as the *Troades* show. Compare especially Cassandra's answers (796 *libertas adest* and 797 *mihi mori est securitas*) with *Tro.* 791 (Andromacha to the condemned Astyanax) *i, vade liber; liberos Troas vide* and *Tro.* 399 (chorus) *spem ponant avidi, solliciti metum*. Fully in keeping with Stoicism, Seneca sees a positive side in death as a liberation from the πάθος, cf. *dial.* 6.19.5, *epist.* 24.17, *epist.* 82.16 (death as *indifferens*). The banquet scene, which Cassandra narrates as dramatic teichoscopy (867–909), not only opens up the possibility of using all the means of verbal art to create a thrilling depiction of deceptive royal splendor and of the brutal murder of Agamemnon, which runs like a film scene in breathless tension before the inner eye of the listener.¹¹ It also establishes the connection to the final hours of Troy, which condenses into the height of irony (875–880). The description concludes with a typically Senecan aphorism (908f.), which arches back to the beginning of the play (by the mention of Thyestes) and provides a concise sketch of nature that has been literally thrown off track by the crimes that have been committed *maiora solito*.

Now everything hastens toward the end of the drama. A deranged Electra rushes out of the palace carrying her baby brother Orestes, the only remaining hope of avenging the crime. Help arrives in the form of Strophius, king of Phocis (913). Appalled at the violent death of his friend Agamemnon, whom he had planned to visit on his way home from the Olympic games, he immediately offers his assistance. This scene allows Seneca to give a detailed sketch of Orestes as the future avenger, a necessary change vis-à-vis Aeschylus because the context of the trilogy is lacking.¹²

After Strophius's departure, which Electra dramatically describes (944f.), comes the confrontation between Electra and her mother, who hurls curses at her and demands she hand over Orestes (953ff.), a scene which the Greek models have made us come to expect. Electra's biting answers, in their sarcasm and in their structure, constitute a close parallel to Cassandra's confrontation with Agamemnon. This element underscores the parallelism of the two characters, which Electra herself, addressing Cassandra in 951f., already hints at.¹³ When Clytemnestra fails to harm Electra, she calls to Aegisthus for help and urges him—a shocking climax to the murderous rage she has become entangled in—to dispatch Electra, her own daughter, with

¹¹ Kugelmeier 2007: 164.

¹² Riemer 1997: 136.

¹³ Riemer 1997: 149, Kugelmeier 2007: 104f.

a stroke of the sword (986 f.). But Aegisthus keeps his head and condemns her to the dungeon, a lingering death while still alive, one that for Electra is much worse than physical death (988–996). Aegisthus, too, as is shown by his icy, scornful entry at this point, has already grown into the tyrannical aspect of his newly acquired role as a ruler (cf. the cynical paradox *rudis est tyrannus, morte qui poenam exigit*: 995).¹⁴

The question of Agamemnon's guilt, or rather, the question of the relation between his active possibilities to act and decide and his entanglement in an unavoidable fate that weighs heavily on him due to his family's dynastic curse, is of course of great interest when it comes up in a drama penned by a self-confessed Stoic. It continues to be discussed with the predictable degree of controversy. Eckard Lefèvre's view, according to which the king's fate should indeed be understood as the result of his continual breaches of divine and human laws, has not met with general acceptance, and wrongly so.¹⁵ Would it not be a strange philosophy that maintained that man is not able by dint of decisions and actions to avoid those things that lead him ever further along the precipitous path on which the *fata* (according to Sen. *epist.* 107.11) are "dragging" him? The high position of a character does not necessarily lead to his destruction; it makes the person of high standing more *prone* to this fate if he, like Agamemnon, but also like his counterpart Priam, is incapable of properly recognizing the signs of impending doom.¹⁶ A necessarily ensuing destruction, in the sense of the fatalistic *fortuna rota volvitur*, would have the absurd consequence that all rulers were well nigh *damned*. Seneca's Agamemnon, like his "raging" Hercules, is far more an archetypal example of a man who has lost sight of the measure of correct action and therefore is no longer being guided in accordance with cosmic reason but being rudely dragged along. What another course of action in such a situation might look like, a course of action based on correct insight, is demonstrated by the poet with the same character in another play, namely Agamemnon in his confrontation with Pyrrhus, *Tro.* 258–270.¹⁷

Opposition has especially been raised to Lefèvre's supposed view that Agamemnon's sexual misdeeds are his real encumbrance (with which the king, moreover, is reproached by the adulteress Clytemnestra).¹⁸ One may

¹⁴ On this tyrant topos see Tarrant 1976 on 994 f.

¹⁵ Opposed by Seidensticker 1985: 128, Hiltbrunner 1985: 1033, Boyle 1983b: 225 f., n. 17 and Gärtner 2003: 39 f.

¹⁶ Shelton 1983: 162.

¹⁷ Lefèvre 1973: 68, cf. also 86; Fantham 1981–1982: 128 f.; Gärtner 2003: 46.

¹⁸ See especially Lefèvre 1966: 461–463; *contra* Hiltbrunner 1985: 1033.

admit that in this view Agamemnon's misbehaviour appears too narrow, even though it must be stressed that according to 174–202 Clytemnestra's injured female pride contains an essential motivation for her deed (even if not the only one: almost as important is her memory of the death of Iphigenia, due to Agamemnon, cf. 163–173, which in Clytemnestra's eyes represents, so to speak, the “original sin” of the whole war, cf. 174). In harmony with the way he is represented in Homer's *Iliad*, his actions display only the “tip of the iceberg.” In reality, his behaviour toward Achilles in the dispute over Briseis demonstrates a more fundamental character flaw, namely a tyrannical will to turn his own intentions and desires into reality, based on a self-confidence that could already be called ὑβρις. Aegisthus recognizes this very clearly when he prophesies (252) that Agamemnon will return as a tyrant and when he certifies him (250) as having an *animus suapte natura trux*.

It is obvious that Seneca clearly differs once again from his predecessor Aeschylus and with the latter's haughtiness-eschewing king (cf. Aischyl. *Ag.* 921–949).

Cassandra, on the other hand, increasingly takes on the role of the great antipodean not only to Agamemnon, but also to his presumed murderers.¹⁹ This triangular approach to the constellation of characters—against two parties, whose most prominent character traits are arrogance and violence, stands a character who embodies dignity even in misfortune—is found nowhere else in Seneca. In the alternating song with the chorus, Cassandra already stands out clearly from her fellow prisoners: she urges them to channel their laments in the right direction (659–661), since her own suffering exceeds that of her fellows (661–663), even in the Stoic sense that he who no longer has anything, no longer has any need to be afraid (695–697). This insight, this inner stance, wrung out of deep pain and manifesting itself in the gesture of relinquishing her status as a seer, is something the wailing chorus cannot comprehend (693 f.). Cassandra is an enigma to them, and becomes downright eerie when she is overcome by another fit of divine rapture (710).

But despite the gruesome details that Seneca depicts in strongly coloured language, from 750 onward things become clearer through the hope of revenge (*fata se vertunt retro*: 758). With the contrast established between the mythical ancestors of the feuding houses, Tantalus and Dardanus, Cassandra's vision escalates into a depiction of the fateful necessity of revenge down through the generations, true to the spirit of tragedy. From this, Cassandra draws the strength to meet her own fate (Agamemnon's entry is announced

¹⁹ Particularly emphasized by Anliker 1972: 450–455, Seidensticker 1985: 123 f. and Lefèvre 1973: 89; see now also Perutelli 1995: 21 f.

already in 778–781). In her depiction of the murder she rejoices at the just revenge (see esp. 870 f.), with the fatal banquet appearing to her as the response to Troy's demise if for no other reason than that (what tragic irony!) Troy's conqueror boasts of the booty he has brought back.

It is with a similar attitude that she hurls at the second opposing party, Clytemnestra, the last verse of the entire play, with which she accepts her own death, confident of the fated vengeance: *veniet et vobis furor* (1012). In the brief verbal duel with Agamemnon she also proves herself to be a more than equal opponent. The mentally superior way in which Cassandra counters his assertion of the power he has won in the war (791–799) demonstrates Stoic traits; she knows, tutored by her own fate, how transitory such glory is. In this short passage it is recognizably the philosopher Seneca who is speaking through Cassandra.²⁰ All the worse—this is the audience's unavoidable reaction—if Agamemnon considers Cassandra's insights to be madness (800 f.), as does, at the very end, Clytemnestra (*furiosa, morere*: 1012).

The key word *furor* (with related forms) runs through Cassandra's entire characterization. Presumably it is no accident that it is the final word of the whole play. The chorus, too, can see in her nothing but obsession (775). But she recognizes in Agamemnon's death the veritable *pretium furoris* (869). Cassandra's final prophecy (*veniet et vobis furor*: 1012) also means the triumph of the slave over her conqueror through the freedom that lies in death. It is this final word that highlights once again the blindness of the supposed victor: the *furor* with which Clytemnestra mocks Cassandra will also befall the usurper in the vengeance of Orestes.

In this constellation, in the exceptional dimensions of her suffering and in her utter misperception by the other characters, Cassandra is isolated in a way familiar from Sophoclean heroes. She is a more tragic figure than the others in this play in which wrong perceptions figure so strongly.

²⁰ Which need not mean that Cassandra is portrayed as “stoic *sapiens*” (for the correct view see Anliker 1972: 452 and Hiltbrunner 1985: 1034). This human type, which according to the Stoic view is exceedingly rare in any case, and which would be useless for a tragic figure, does not occur in Seneca's dramas (Lefèvre 1973: 64), cf. the analogous discussion concerning the figure of Hercules in the *Hercules Furens* and that of Thyestes in the *Thyestes*.

THYESTES

Chiara Torre

“The *Thyestes* is an extraordinarily cohesive play, in which all the elements of drama—plot, character, setting, language—work together to produce an impact of shattering power”: Tarrant’s opinion, found in the introduction of his unexcelled commentary (Tarrant 1985: 43), continues to be the starting point of any critical approach to this play.

DATE

Despite the uncertainty pertaining to the tragedies’ chronology, the broadly accepted theory of dating *Thyestes* to Seneca’s last years (about 62 AD) is based on stylistic and metrical grounds (Fitch 1981), on features of the Chorus (Mazzoli 1996: 15), and—with due caution—on historical and geographic anachronisms (Nisbet 1990).

Other attempts at dating *Thyestes*, inspired by a biographic-positivist method together with a fad of actualization, have been made to read this tragedy as a *tragédie à clef*. However, this kind of approach does not offer any real evidence for dating the play since it is very difficult to draw the line between real anti-tyrannical references made by the author himself and other political reuses that might have involved mythological characters—the Pelopides in particular—in ancient Rome (Malaspina 2004: 294–296, 312; see also Lana 1958–1959, La Penna 1979: 134 f.).

Certainly, “there is an undeniable fascination” (Tarrant 1985: 13) in reading *Thyestes* as a reflection on Seneca’s experiences during the last decade of Nero’s reign; an increasing pessimism in Seneca’s political doctrine has actually been noted, according to the order of the *Etruscus codex* of which *Thyestes* represents the most extreme position (Malaspina 2004: 300 f.). Though this fascination is indeed undeniable, it might be time to consider reading *Thyestes* beyond Nero in order to allow this play its full aesthetic meaning as a tragedy of and about power.

Being the last of about twenty almost completely lost Greek and Latin tragedies dedicated to the myth of Pelopides (Aricò 1981, Picone 1984: 5 f., Tarrant 1985: 40 f., Monteleone 1991: 252 f., Blänsdorf 2008: 177 f.), Seneca’s

Thyestes focuses, in particular, on the theme of *regnum* as deceit, the reversal of cosmic order, and the manifestation of Hell on Earth (Picone 1984: 27 f., 50 f., 117 f.).

PLOT

Thyestes, like *Medea* and *Hercules furens*, fully respects the “classical” structure (Hor. *ars* 188 f.) of five acts interwoven with four odes, sung by only one Chorus.

In the beginning of his commentary to *Thyestes*, Nicolaus Trevet synthetically explains the plot in these words:

Continet autem hec tragedia quinque actus, quorum primus est incitatio fratrum ad scelus et discordiam, secundus est deliberatio Atrai cum servo de scelere committendo in fratrem, tercius est reditus Thiestis in patriam et receptio eius a fratre Atrai, quartus est occisio filiorum Thyestis et preparatio eorum in cibis, quintus est de convivio facto Thiesti et appositione filiorum suorum.¹

All that is further needed is to enrich this concise summary with a few details. First, it is the Fury who spurs the brothers to the crime, coming to Pelopides’s house, dragging the ghost of Tantalus, and forcing him to persuade his grandsons to commit a crime greater than any that had ever been committed within the family. Second, Thyestes’s return to the homeland takes place after he had been deceived by the promise of peace sent by his brother; Thyestes confides his fears to the eldest of his three sons, Tantalus Jr., on the way back. Third, the murder and cooking of Thyestes’s children are not shown on stage but are described by a messenger. Last, Thyestes realizes that he has devoured his children only after Atreus shows him their heads (1004 f.) through a *coup de théâtre* that is crucial for the debate between those who affirm or deny Senecan theatre’s representation on stage (Fitch 2000: 4, Kugelmeier 2007: 222 f.). The setting of the tragedy is Mycene or Argos (for the conflation of these cities, see Tarrant 1985: 150).

FRAMEWORKS

A description of the plot *per quinque actus*, however, would not be the best approach to *Thyestes*: indeed, we may point out that in the process

¹ Franceschini 1938: 9 (lines 18–25).

of the play's exegesis various frameworks of action on different levels have been discovered. To this vertical structure increasingly complex meanings have been attributed, which are all based on the same meta-dramatic presumption, the overlapping of Atreus's preparation of the *nefas* and the artistic staging of the play (Hine 1981, Picone 1984, Monteleone 1991, Schiesaro 2003).

First, what has been highlighted is the meta-dramatic value of the prologue, which is the outermost frame of *Thyestes* (considering the hypothesis that Tantalus's ghost stays on stage throughout the play as a witness without actually interacting: Monteleone 1991: 187 f., Schiesaro 2003: 48 f., 178–180). The dialogue between the Fury and Tantalus's ghost, not only informs the audience about the nature of the main players but also represents the staging of the *fabula* through the use of polysemic language alluding to artistic creation.

A second and third framework are then indicated within this outermost frame (especially, Schiesaro 2003: 48 f.). If the Fury puts the first *fabula* into action, Atreus doubles it, creating an Euripidean tragedy of deceit. Hence, the second frame encompasses Atreus's planning of the crime as well as his carrying it through; this frame is also a *fabula* in five parts: the dialogue between Atreus and the *satelles* (Act II, 176–335), Atreus's monologue (Act III, 491–507) when he sees his exiled brother coming back to the homeland, the Messenger's ῥῆσις in which the murder and cooking of Thyestes's children are described (Act IV, 623–788), Atreus's last monologue (Act V, 885–919), and the final verbal strife between the brothers after the ἀναγνώρισμός (Act V, 1005–1012).

On the third, deeper level Atreus comes onto the stage that he himself has prepared almost as if he were an atrocious caricature of the Plautin *servus*. Atreus's entrance on the stage to falsely welcome his brother (Act III, 508–545) is preceded by a kind of third prologue between Thyestes and his son (Act III, 404–490) and is followed by the scene in which the tyrant, at first unseen, observes Thyestes's song and afterward brings his brother to the ἀναγνώρισμός through a dialogue rich in tragic irony (Act V, 920–1004).

It has been stated (Schiesaro 2003: 61–64) that, through the winding relationship on the different levels of the drama, Seneca forces the audience to deal with a work in progress: lacking its teleological outlet, *Thyestes* becomes an open, unfinished, reiterated tragedy. Yet, more than a type of tunnel vision that dizzies the audience, the main effect of these frames is the possibility of reading *Thyestes* as a sort of palindrome, from past to present, from the cosmic plane to the earthly *regnum*, from the Argolic landscape to the darkest hiding place of the *domus Pelopia*, and *vice versa*. This possibility

of reading *Thyestes* back and forth, descending or ascending from one frame to another, is surely the fruit of a well-defined structure, fully controlled by the poet himself, in which the audience is invited to not completely lose its bearings.

CHARACTERS

The frame structure of this play also explains the symmetry between characters who essentially act in pairs through successive interactions (the Fury vs. Tantalus's ghost, Atreus vs. *satelles*, Tantalus Jr. vs. Thyestes) and allusively replay the conflict between the brothers (Tarrant 1985: 45). This conflict is shown on the third level of the play and is mirrored on the other levels by the same polarity between the stronger, winning character, full of self-knowledge, master of his own will, able manipulator of language; and the weaker, losing character, destined to succumb despite having tried to resist (Schiesaro 2003: 63 f.).

The pair Atreus-Thyestes, however, cannot be reduced to the opposition between protagonist and antagonist: through an important structural modification within Pelopides's myth Seneca renounces putting a real antagonist in the tragedy by inserting a victim, an exiled, tormented Thyestes (Picone 1984: 73 f.).

Thus, Seneca stresses the violent impact that the *rex* has on the system of characters and activates, once more, the same meta-dramatic presumption: Atreus, omnipotent in reign and word, emblematically shares the power to create and destroy with the *vates*.

Atreus's artistic project is "sublime" because it is inspired by principles of action of a poetic nature, matching the aesthetics of the *Περὶ ὕψους* that also clearly appears in several parts of Senecan prose (Picone 1984: 56 f., Schiesaro 2003: 127 f., Torre 2007: 52 f.)

Thyestes may be defined, on the contrary, *ignotus sibi*, paraphrasing the end of the second Chorus (403). Only once does he have the opportunity of looking into the depth of his soul and even then only at the will of his brother. The anapestic monody that Thyestes sings, brimful of cursed food and wine (920–969), is hence a duet between the conscious voice, trying in vain to repress the sadness and fear he feels, and the subconscious voice (Traina 2003: 191 f.), which derives its clearer vision through pain and angst, thereby almost reaching the *ἀναγνωρισμός*. This song however, begun on Atreus's cue (918b–919), is interrupted by the appearance of Atreus himself on the stage (970 f.).

The ambiguity of the character of Thyestes reaches its apex in this monody. Actually, there are many types of Thyestes in *Thyestes*. Beyond the philosophical readings of this character—Thyestes as the Stoic wise man as well as *proficiens* (Gigon 1938: 179 f., Lefèvre 1985b: 1263 f., Monteleone 1991: 232–243, Picone 1984: 74 f.) or as a Stoic caricature (Monteleone 1991: 244–252)—beyond autobiographical interpretations (Mantovanelli 1984: 122 f.), the fact remains that Thyestes has many different faces frame per frame.

Whereas Thyestes (in the first prologue) is fully interchangeable with his brother in the Fury's opinion and Atreus, preparing his plan (in the "second" prologue), identifies himself with his brother, in the third *fabula* (more specifically in the dialogue with his son), the character appears fragmented on different temporal levels. In the very recent past, which he would like to portray, in vain, as a solid, long-lasting condition, he is an *exul* leading a savage life, far from the enticements of the *regnum* as well as human society (424–428); Thyestes is instead a tyrant corrupted by power in a past he would like to depict as distant, but which he describes in such detail as to express its ever-existing seductions (446–470). In the immediate present he plays the *supplex* before his brother (517–521) and indeed, of his own spontaneous will, takes on the negative image of himself that Atreus threaded him with in the previous framework (512–514).

The manifold faces of Thyestes appear again in his monody, but in an inverted sequence (935–938: the old mask of the *exul*; 937: the new image of the *rex*). Nonetheless, the voice of his unconsciousness paints a different picture still, which will prove to be the truest: undone by lust and macerated by pain (941 f.), Thyestes announces his transformation into a contaminated creature or a *φάρμακός* not unlike Oedipus in the homonymous tragedy, as is then revealed in the final scene (1068 f.; Picone 1984: 75).

This multifaced character is metadramatically enhanced by the variety of his costumes (the *exul's* rags: 505 f.; the royal clothing and the crown: 524–526; 531 f.) that Atreus dictates (Schiesaro 2003: 137). Hence, Seneca brings us to think about the making of a tragic character—and Thyestes's character is tragic above all in Aristotle's point of view (*poet.* 13.1453a. 8 f.)—by putting various models of Thyestes on the stage with different dramatic features.

Unfortunately, the intertextual depth of this character escapes us: indeed, Seneca's multifaced Thyestes may be the sum of many Thyestes of previous lost Greek and Latin tragedies, *in primis* the Thyestes of Accius's *Atreus* (Picone 1984: 76 f., 128 f.).

CHORUSES

Thyestes contains four odes, sung by only one Chorus of Argive citizens. Beyond his own lyric space, the Chorus is heard only once, in the fourth act, when he exchanges a few lines with the Messenger. He is completely absent from the other acts as can be deduced by his jarring ignorance of the ensuing tragic events.

The first ode is set right after the prologue, the fourth before the epilogue. The mimetic cohesion of the choral songs with the unfolding action is feeble (Mazzoli 1996: 4 n. 5). Rather, the morphologic description of the choral system, based on the combination of the elements of lyric tradition, *καίρος*, *μῦθος*, and *γνώμη* (Mazzoli 1996: 7 f., 13 f. and *infra*, pp. 561–564), proves to be more useful. *Thyestes* is similar to *Medea* and *Hercules furens*, presenting a choral pattern, circular and symmetric in structure: the two outermost choruses, morphologically alike in that the *καίρος* is followed by a long *μῦθος*, enclose the plot between two cosmic catastrophes, Tantalus's *nefas* (I) and the end of the world (IV), whereas the middle choruses (II and III) both stay on the plane of the deceitful *καίρος* (the only apparent reconciliation between the brothers) but express deep thoughts on power through a blind vision on the plane of the *γνώμη*, highlighting a crucial turning point in action (the momentary conversion of Thyestes and then his relapse into *regnum*'s allure).

The first song (122–175, first asclepiads) opens with a prayer to the Gods who protect Argos in order to stop the *alternae scelorum* [...] *vices* (133). In the second, broader part of the song, the family's crimes are summoned forth, above all Tantalus's crime, which would ideally have been removed before. The contrast with the prologue is clear (the Chorus beseeches the Gods to inhibit the proliferation of the *nefas* that has already begun) and is highlighted by the different views of the same Argolic landscape: at the end of the prologue (122–131) the view is seen at ground level, through the Fury's eyes, following the steps of Tantalus; at the beginning of this ode (110–119) there is a bird's-eye view, a perspective like that of the Gods (perhaps alluding to backstage scenes, cf. Aygon 2004: 170 n. 130).

If verses 336–338 are accepted as true (Tarrant 1985: 139, Zwierlein 1986a), the second song (336–403, glyconics: Gancotti 1989) begins with the Chorus's amazement at the brothers' truce. The Chorus then condemns the *furor* of power pushing both brothers toward the throne (339–343), thereby starting a lengthy meditation on the *regnum* (344–403), contrasting with Act II (Atreus's greed for power) as well as Act III (Thyestes's superficial conversion).

The *meditatio regni* is split into two parts (344–368, 369–403): the first expresses the Stoic paradox that only the wise man is king (the contiguity between *sapiens* and *rex* has many parallels in prose works: Monteleone 1991: 224 f.; especially in the *De vita beata*: Schiesaro 1996: 23 f.). The second part, protreptic and Horatian-like (Monteleone 1991: 225 n. 102; 229 f.) compares the anxieties of political life to the Chorus's choice, which is the *otium* as the practice of one's inner life (a more in-depth interpretation of Horatian *modus* by Seneca: Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1999: 39 f.).

The anachronisms here are evident: the longing for a *nullis nota Quiritibus / aetas* (396 f.; Picone 1984: 87) touches upon autobiography (Tarrant 1985: 147) and the geographic, Horatian-like *excursus* (369–379) matches the northern and eastern borders of the Empire in the Augustan Age (Tarrant 1985: 143).

The third song (546–621, Sapphic hendecasyllables) expresses astonishment at Atreus's changed behavior toward Thyestes. The Chorus celebrates the defeat of *Ira*, sketched as a warlike divinity ready to attack, and the victory of *Pietas* who, *in extremis*, is able to placate the brothers' hate (546–559). The Chorus wonders which of the Gods gave them peace (560 f.), singing the overcome threat of a civil war (562–576), comparing this newfound peace to the calm after an impending, yet never arrived storm (577–595).

Up to this point, the ode seems to act as a dramatic *ἐκτασις* before the catastrophe (the slaughter in Act IV). This function is then compromised by progressive pessimism, insinuated from the beginning (Tarrant 1985: 169) and evident in the final part (596–622), where the Chorus bewails the mutability of Luck (thus there is no incompatibility between the two parts of the ode, which would suggest apparent autobiographical interpretations, as stated by Monteleone 1991: 260–289).

The visual nature of this ode is expressed in the allegorical, sculptural diptych of *Ira* and *Pietas* (552–559; Tarrant 1985: 171); in the description, almost a landscape view, of the citizens' preparation for war (563–572); in the description of the stormy sea and harsh winds, drafted as a synthetic yet broad *topographia*, not lacking geographic coherence (it is not a *pastiche*, as stated by Monteleone 1991: 346).

The fourth song (789–884, anapests) reveals the Chorus's strange reaction to the Messenger's ῥῆσις. As if blocking out the horror just heard, the Chorus painfully wonders why the Sun has fled in the middle of the day, ignoring the link the Messenger has just given between Thyestes's banquet and the eclipse (775 f.). The ode continues in successive waves from the *καίρως* to the *μῦθος* of the end of the world, which is represented as the Gods falling into a vortex: in a final rotation round the Zodiac, the constellations are spilled out one by one into the abyss, followed by the unmoving stars (828–874). This

description is shaped by the tradition of astronomic poetry, together with Stoic and Neopythagorean influences (Tarrant 1985: 209–213).

The two main opinions, found throughout the ode and permeated with Stoicism, are placed side by side but not completely blended in the final lines (Volk 2006: 190 f.): one, the fatalistic doctrine of the cosmic cycles, the other, the concept of the progressive degeneration of humanity, which, by the *συνπάθεια*, will break the cosmic order.

SETTING AND IMAGERY

Thyestes is not only a tragedy about power but a tragedy in which seats of power and their symbolic meaning are fully represented on stage. Within that “thickly interwoven network of motifs that encompasses all the figures and themes of drama” and renders the play’s imagery so cohesive (Tarrant 1985: 46 f.), the Messenger’s description of the *Domus Pelopia* is the structural pivot that provides unity to the rest of the play (641–682; Smolenaars 1998, Nenci 2002: 48–59, Aygon 2004: 229–231, Riemer 2007). Thus the setting, like the plot, is structured in different frames: the palace proper (641–648) with the great, royal hall open to the public; a secret part of the palace that, like a symbolic labyrinth of the tragic plot, weaves in and out of various spaces, winding down into a gloomy grove, surrounded by a dark spring (649–679); last, within the grove itself, a cave, the real core of the reign, where Atreus carries out the *nefas* (679 f.).

An effective combination of *locus horridus* and *locus dionysiacus* (according to the classification of Malaspina 1994: 13 f.), matching the patterns of landscape paintings of the first century AD (Aygon 2004: 364 f.), can be appreciated in this description.

A metadramatic function has also been attributed to this “dionysiac” feature of the *specus*, which could be a symbol of poetic inspiration in relation to Augustan poetry, a core intertextual component of Seneca’s *loca horrida* (Schiesaro 2006: 441–449).

Indeed, this *descriptio loci* encompasses several Virgilian references, above all those of *Aeneid* 6 (Petrone 1986–1987: 137 f.). Hence, a perfect correspondence is established between the hellish imagery of the palace and the imagery of sacrifice associated with Atreus’s *nefas* (coming from Accius’s *Atreus*, at least in part). At the heart of the play, as well as of the history of *Thyestes*’s exegesis, this hellish, cannibalistic sacrifice requires Atreus as oracle, priest, God, and executor at the same time (e.g., Picone 1984: 89–108, Maz-zoli 1989a, Solimano 1989: 588 f., Nenci 2002: 64 f., Aygon 2003, Pociña 2003).

Other Virgilian allusions (Petrone 1986–1987: 137 f., Smolenaars 1998: 50–60, Nenci 2002: 54 n. 63) to the palace of Latinus (*Aen.* 7.170–191), the temple of Apollo (*Aen.* 6.9–13), and the cave of Cacus (*Aen.* 8.241–305) lead toward a “palatine” reading of Atreus’s hellish palace. Nonetheless, this reading should not be limited either to topographical allusions to the *Domus aurea* future (Tarrant 1985: 183) nor to previous building restorations on the Palatine Hill in the Neronian Age; rather it might involve the symbolic construction of seats of power in its Augustan roots. Thus, multiple references to imagery of the Sun as well as of the *Circus* linked to the Palace (123, 409 f., 659–662) might be both Neronian and Augustan: *Thyestes* may reflect that complex, solar reading of *Circus Maximus* and *Palatium*, which was promoted by Augustus and successively carried through by Nero (Barchiesi 2008: 530).

The multilayered *domus* invites us not only to an intertextual reading (from Augustan poetry to the Neronian Age) but also to a symbolic one: from the seat of power—symbolized by the hall and grove, represented as an ordinary, Virgilian Hades—to an “*ultra-Tartarus*,” which Atreus inhabits and which Thyestes seeks in vain at the end of the play (1013–1019; a similar image is found in *Hercules furens*: Aygon 2004: 204–207, 375 f.): one gains access here through the cave of horrors, symbol of the tyrant’s dark heart.

METADRAMA AND INTERTEXTUALITY

While the widespread reading of *Thyestes* as a tragedy of inversion, based on the above-mentioned, metadramatic identity of Atreus as anti-*vates*, has never been in conflict with the aesthetics expressed in the philosophical works, the same metadramatic approach has recently sparked a much less conciliatory hypothesis pertaining to Senecan poetics. This approach, applied to the main intertexts of *Thyestes*, that is to say a large part of *Aeneid* 7 (the “prologue” to the fratricidal war under Alecto’s *furor*), and the *Thracium nefas* of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 6, reveals tragic poetry itself as the embodiment of the *nefas*, as well as unrepressed speech, gifted with extraordinarily powerful knowledge by the strength of passions (Schiesaro 2003).

Through the discovery of this “self-conscious, meta-dramatic intertextuality” (Schiesaro 2003: 224), the epistemological power of passions now appears as an important thematic core of *Thyestes*. Nonetheless, this core could be drawn to a more general theory of the epistemological function pertaining to the tragic mimesis, one not incompatible with Seneca’s philosophical thinking.

This does not mean accepting the thesis (Nussbaum 1993a: 146–149) for which “epic,” “Brechtian” theater of Seneca might promote a critical spectatorship, but instead suggesting that Seneca may have taken the idea of epistemological pleasure, mixing passions and knowledge through the construction of the *μῦθος* or plot, from Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Donini 2008: LXIII f.; Donini’s thesis, which excludes catharsis from *Poetics*, now theoretically opens the opportunity of an “Aristotelian” reading of Seneca’s theater, which is waiting to be demonstrated through the historical reconstruction of *Poetics*’ reception in Rome).

AN ARISTOTELIAN TRAGEDY?

The metadramatic approach itself promises to reveal Aristotelian traces pertaining to the structure of the plot that, according to Aristotle, ensures the philosophical value of a tragedy.

The Fury, understood as the author, seems to respect the theory of tragic *παθητικόν* that Aristotle sets within the plot especially where the pathetic events of the play involve family relationships (*poet.* 14.1453b. 19–22). In this passage, the *πάθος*, provoked by the violation of blood ties, is expressed in a series of *polyptota* and a double chiasm, figuratively representing the affinity of those involved. In the prologue of *Thyestes* (39–46) the plot the Fury is staging is explained through a stylistic device quite similar, in structure and meaning, to that of Aristotle.

Thus, it may be suggested that Seneca here alludes to Aristotelian theory (also through an Ovidian intertext: *met.* 1.144–150; Tarrant 1985: 93, Mantovanelli 1992: 209, Mazzoli 1997a: 89 f.). Furthermore, who could better announce the theory of tragic *παθητικόν* than a protatic Fury, embodying *πάθος* as well as poetic inspiration, on the point of writing a plot of family crimes?

Another Aristotelian implication can be found in the staging of a traditional, mythical event associated with the *cena Thyestea*, which is the eclipse. This event is obsessively represented five times in *Thyestes* (in the prologue, in Act IV, in the fourth ode, and twice in Act V) and has an important function in the psychological make-up of the characters (Volk 2006: 184). Yet, the eclipse also has a metadramatic meaning that emerges at the end of the *ῥῆσις* when the *nuntius* affirms the need of seeing despite the impending darkness (788).

The Sun’s escape therefore has a symbolic value pertaining to tragedy as representation. On the first level, the darkness produced by the eclipse may have the role of removing the *ῥῆσις*, should it overcome acceptable limits:

the eclipse in *Thyestes* debates the strategies of representing horror in a real, Aristotelian way. On the second level, the eclipse is interpreted as a threat because, denying sight itself, it seems also to deny the tragedy. Therefore both the Messenger (788) and Atreus (893 f.) strongly stress the need of opening up darkness in order to carry out the *fabula*, to save the μῦθος itself and bring it to the λύσις. This is the crucial problem of representing evil and negativity.

Lastly, the fourth ode, in its absurd contrast and anachronism (as a foolish flight toward the end of the world), tries to rewrite the plot once again, taking it from the καίρος to the universal plane: the Chorus interprets the Messenger's invitation to see the crimes in their entirety on another level, trying to find the cause of darkness beyond the καίρος to reach the universal meaning of the μῦθος.

The Chorus's attempt comes at the crucial turning point, where the *fabula* at the heart of the plot seeks its λύσις thereby producing the full, pleasant understanding of the necessary chain of cause and effect, according to Aristotle. However, in order to accomplish this process of universalization (hence, a "philosophical" process), the Chorus must immerse itself in darkness and fear, and accept being blind to the plot: as the audience well knows, the eclipse is not the end of the world, as the Chorus thinks.

The Sun's escape in *Thyestes* brings the theory and practice of classical theater to its breaking point, without going beyond it, making way for a new theater of the φαντασία (a possibility promoted through different data by Kugelmeier 2007: 235 f.).

PART THREE

TRAGEDY

Dubious Works

HERCULES OETAEUS

C.A.J. Littlewood

DATING

Hercules Oetaeus is of uncertain authorship. If truly Seneca's its many reminiscences of other plays in the corpus suggest a very late date. The death and transfiguration of Hercules have seemed to some a subject very attractive to a philosopher who would make a Stoic end to his own life in AD 65 (Rozelaar 1985: 1391–401). Fitch's scheme of relative dating, generally accepted for the tragedies of undisputed authorship, would place *Herc. O.* earlier however, certainly before *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* (Fitch 1981: 303 n. 21). And it is harder then to explain anomalous features of *Herc. O.* as the signs of a play hastily written and lacking revision. Echoes of Silius Italicus and Statius suggest a later date around the beginning of the second century AD (Zwierlein 1986b: 313–343). But it is not easy to determine which is the source and which the echo: literary parallels on their own are not a secure basis for dating (Nisbet 1995: 210). *Herc. O.* has certain stylistic features that distinguish it from the securely Senecan plays in the corpus. Both *Herc. O.* and *Octavia* end with a briefly lyric summation after the manner of Euripides not of Seneca. Other distinctive features are more tendentious. Too often arguments for and against Senecan authorship become a debate over the quality of the poetry (Rozelaar 1985: 1353–1363 on Friedrich 1954).

CONTENT

The content of the drama is briefly as follows. Eurytus, king of Oechalia, had refused Hercules his daughter Iole. Hercules sacked the city, killed Eurytus and sent Iole back to Trachis as a captive. The first act of the drama shows Hercules celebrating his victory over the entire world and Iole's melancholy journey into exile and slavery. Discovering Hercules's latest conquest, his wife Deianira resolves to win back his affections and sends him a robe smeared with the blood of the centaur Nessus. Nessus had once tried to abduct Deianira, was shot by one of Hercules's poisoned arrows, and, dying,

gave her some of his blood to use as an aphrodisiac. But the centaur's blood turns out to be poison not a love-charm, and Hercules is brought home in mortal agony. Deianira commits suicide. Hercules learns that a dead man has destroyed him, as was once prophesied, and gives orders for a pyre to be constructed on Mount Oeta. In the final act of the play Philoctetes reports that Hercules had mastered his agony amid the flames and counselled the onlookers, notably Alcmena, to show similar fortitude. Alcmena grieves her dead son, but Hercules, now a divine spirit, appears and comforts her with the news of his apotheosis.

TOPICS

Herc. O. is an extraordinary play. Over 650 lines longer than its closest rival in the Senecan corpus, *Herc. O.* exceeds also the limits of Sophocles's *Trachiniae*. Sophocles ended his tragedy with Hercules being carried offstage to his pyre. The author of *Herc. O.* adds a coda, the fifth act, in which Hercules burns away his mortal part and becomes a god. Here uniquely is the Stoic hero many had expected to find in a philosopher's tragedies. Scholars such as Marti found here at last a drama to resolve the questions raised by its tragic predecessors, primarily Seneca's own, but also those of the Greek tradition.¹ No Senecan play ends so positively, but the inspiration for the ending is ultimately Ovidian (*met.* 9.101–172, discussed below). Although the effect is unusual, the method of composition (Greek tragedy reworked through Ovid and/or Virgil) is typically Senecan.

By enduring the flames of the funeral pyre Hercules wins a more secure and lasting victory than that afforded him by his triumphs over monsters and tyrants. His victory over the flames completes his life (1614–1616). Hercules's claim to Jupiter at the beginning of the play, that all the world had been subdued (1–103), is only now fulfilled: *en domita omnia* ("see, everything has been mastered!": 1612). Hercules's death teaches a lesson: *Esse iam flammam nihil / ostendit ille* ("He *showed* that even flames are nothing": 1610 f.). Hercules tells Alcmena to control her grief and appears tranquil himself (1673–1685). The audience learns the lesson and Alcmena, dry eyed, comes to resemble her son (1686–1690). Even half-burned, Hercules stands upright as an example to those watching; he continues to speak to them and give them courage (1736–1744). The scene bears comparison with the fifth act of *Troades* in which

¹ Marti 1945: 241 f. See also Marucci 1997: 109 on *Herc. O.* as going beyond and completing the Senecan corpus.

Astyanax and Polyxena die nobly but mute before an audience congregated as if in a theater (*Tro.* 1125). *Troades* emphasizes the wide variation in the audience's response and shows a mob that is trivial and morally compromised in its viewing (Littlewood 2004: 240–258). In *Hercules Oetaeus* the hero will not allow his death to become a scene to delight Juno's malevolence (1675–1678) and directs his audience to respond in one, philosophically appropriate manner. Alcmena continues to lament her son after his death. Philoctetes urges her to control her emotions in the name of Herculean virtue (1831–1836). Finally, the hero himself appears to assure her of his immortality and to allay her grief.

The heroism of Hercules's earlier life is more problematic. A chorus describing the invulnerable warrior (151–164) may remind us of passages in the moral dialogues describing the resolute *sapiens*, but such reminiscences are reassuring only if we forget (as Tietze 1991 rather oddly advises us to do) that the speakers are Oechalian captives, women who proceed to liken Hercules to a giant waging war on Olympus (167–170).² In *Herc. O.* as in *Hercules Furens*, Herculean virtue is all too close to vice, all too easily turned against itself. In Deianira's view, Herculean virtue is a sham: *vitium impotens / virtus vocatur* ("vice unmastered goes by the name of virtue": 421 f.). Even friendly witnesses, looking at the destructive agony of the poison, are reminded of the violence of Hercules's life. Alcmena does not at first believe that Hercules has been poisoned and wonders if perhaps his labors have fed this bloody disease in him (1397 f.). And she is not far wrong: the poison is in fact a rapist's blood mingled with the venom of the legendary hydra (914 f.)—poetic justice for the man whose labors, at least in Deianira's eyes, were a mere pretext for rape (417–422). The hero himself recognizes in the fatal poison something like Hercules (*o malum simile Herculi*: 1264). In the first speech of the play Hercules, asking for immortality as a reward for a pacified earth, says, ominously, *Hercules monstri loco / iam coepit esse* ("now Hercules begins to take the place of a monster": 55 f.).

Repeated patterns of imagery play an important structural role in *Herc. O.* Deianira compares the pain of an angry wife to the hydra and to the fires of Aetna (284–286) and this is the form given to the pain that Hercules suffers through the medium of the poisoned robe. Desire and destruction are brought together through common imagery as Deianira begs Cupid to shoot Hercules (541–548) before he can feign passion and shoot her as he did Megara (429 f.). The imagery does not always reinforce what is openly said:

² Tietze 1991: 40 f. On similarities between this vision of Hercules and the characterization of the hubristic Capaneus in Statius, *Thebaid* 10 see Marucci 1997: 276 f.

Deianira intends the robe as a love charm and kills her husband by accident, but the imagery by which the robe gives physical form to her anger suggests otherwise. In the final act yet another description of burning agony offers an opportunity for the hero to break free of the cycle of imagery, redefine himself and bring closure to the drama. Alcmena had advised her son, eaten alive by poison, to restrain his tears, to defy death and show himself truly Herculean (1374–1376). He was unable to, but resolved to choose a glorious death worthy of himself (1481 f.). His calm endurance on the burning pyre revises both the burning agony of the poison and the burning passion of Deianira, whom the nurse had futilely urged to restrain her complaints, master the flames (of passion), and show herself the wife of Hercules (275–277). The tree-felling on Mt Oeta is another conspicuously symbolic scene. A massive tree, which suffers wounds and is too tough for the axes that assail it (1623–1628), symbolizes Hercules himself (Nisbet 1995: 204). It is also a prophetic oak, which blocks out the light. Its fall challenges the prophecy of another oak (1473–1448) that Hercules would be laid low by a dead man. When it falls, immediately the light of heaven is revealed (1629–1631).

SOURCES

The most important source for *Herc. O.* is Seneca's *Herc. f.*³ The prologue, in which Hercules reviews his great deeds, recalls Juno's hostile and Amphytrion's favorable accounts in *Herc. f.* (1–74 and 205–248) and, ominously, the prayer that immediately precedes the outbreak of madness in the fourth act of *Herc. f.* *Herc. f.*'s Juno, angered by Jupiter's repeated infidelity and finding a pattern for madness in Hercules's labors (Littlewood 2004: 115–117), is a model for Deianira, who is displaced by Iole. Even within the dramatic illusion, we are persistently reminded of the events of *Herc. f.*: Deianira remembers Megara's death; the nurse sees a parallel between Deianira, grief-stricken for a crime committed in error, and Hercules, accidental killer of Megara (*Herc. O.* 9039); both Alcmena and Hyllus (Hercules's son) misrecognize Hercules's agony as another outbreak of the madness of *Herc. f.* (806 f., 1407, 1404). Seneca's Clytemnestra (in *Agamemnon*) and Medea, a woman who avenges infidelity with a poisoned robe, provide important models for Deianira, but ones that fit awkwardly with her Sophoclean characterization. In *Trachiniae*, whose influence is very strong in the third and fourth acts of *Herc. O.*, the

³ For literary sources for *Herc. O.* see Jakobi 1988: 168–201, Walde 1992 and above all Marucci 1997.

wife desires only to win her husband back. The Oechalian captives recall the captive Trojan women in both *Troades* and *Agamemnon*; the overreaching Hercules recalls Seneca's Oedipus. The influence of Senecan tragedy is pervasive, but not always effective. Medea's famous *peperi* (I have given birth [and can conceive the kind of revenge a mere *virgo* cannot], *Med.* 50) is weak by comparison in Deianira's mouth (*Herc. O.* 274). With some justification, Jakobi offers a string of reminiscences under the heading, "Cento-Technik; Kontamination mehrerer Vorbilder" (Jakobi 1988: 168).

Beyond Seneca *Herc. O.* looks to Sophocles and Ovid. *Heroides* 9 turns on the elegiac polarities of the erotic and the warlike and this source inspires, for example, the nurse's description of conquering Hercules as a slave to love (*Herc. O.* 363–367). *Metamorphoses* 9.101–272 is important primarily for describing what Sophocles did not: Hercules purified and made divine in the flames of the funeral pyre. The author of *Herc. O.* does, however, take care to rewrite Ovid more somberly: the description of the hero reclining on the pyre like a banqueter surrounded by wine and garlands (*met.* 9.236–238) is not echoed in the tragedy (Walde 1992: 231). Marucci has argued strongly for the influence of Lucan (Marucci 1997: 269–321). More generally *Herc. O.* shows itself a product of the Latin poetic tradition. Virgil's Dido informs Deianira as she does the heroines of the Senecan corpus (Fantham 1975). The Orpheus ode (1031–1130) looks back through *Herc. f.* to *Georgics* 4 (Walde 1992: 58–65). The tree-felling on Mt Oeta is an example of a familiar topos. If the excessive preparations for Misenus's funeral (*Aen.* 6.179–182) show Virgil aiming to surpass Ennius's tree-felling scene (Hinds 1998: 11–13), what may we say of the massive expansion of a few words of Ovid (*met.* 9.235–236) into a twenty-four line ekphrasis (*Herc. O.* 1618–1641), which is still a tight fit (*angustum rogum*: 1638) for the mighty Hercules (Walde 1992: 73)?

RECEPTION

The fifth act of *Herc. O.*, with the hero's ordeal by fire and subsequent apotheosis, is the best-remembered part of the tragedy and inspires much of the final act of Chapman's problematically Stoic tragedy, *Bussy D'Ambois* (?1604).⁴ Fatally wounded, Bussy remembers that Vespasian died on his feet and resolves to emulate him: "I am up / Here like a Roman statue; I will stand / Till death hath made me marble" (v.iii.143–145). But it is through the world

⁴ On this tragedy as anti-Stoic see Dollimore 1989: 182–188.

of Hercules that his fame is to fly (*Bussy d'Ambois* v.iii.147–153 cf. *Herc. O.* 1518–1524), and it is with Hercules's words that he orders his death announced: "And tell them all that D'Ambois now is hasting / To the eternal dwellers" (v.iii.154–155) cf. *dic ad aeternos properare manes / Herculem* (*Herc. O.* 1525f.).

OCTAVIA

Rolando Ferri

DATE

The date of *Octavia* is perhaps the most controversial issue about this play. The attribution to Seneca is now generally thought to be untenable, on considerations of style (see *infra*), historical allusions (most importantly Agrippina's prophecy of Nero's death at 629–631), and finally the appearance of the philosopher himself in two long scenes at 377–592.¹ However, no scholarly consensus has yet been reached as to how late after Nero's fall the play could have been composed. In recent years, a Galban dating has been championed against the traditional Flavian chronology, on the basis of possible points of contact with Galba's political propaganda.² Supporters of an early dating stress the restitutive attitude of the play with regard to Nero's victims. Critics who wish to set the date of composition at a greater remove from the events stress its possible reliance on written sources, suggested by the extensive overlap with the extant historical accounts of the Neronian period. Later dating proposals seem likely to be ruled out by the great accuracy of the playwright's historical information, either as a witness to the events, or because he had access to well-informed sources.³ In addition, the

¹ The earliest scholars to advance doubts on the play's authorship seem to have been Petrarch and Coluccio Salutati: Martellotti 1972.

² Galba: Barnes 1982: 215–217; Kragelund 1982: 38–52, 1988: 503–508 (or early in Vespasian's reign), 2005: 69–78; and Wiseman 2001: 10–23; various dates during the Flavian period have been suggested by Zwiernie 1986b: 445, Junge 1999: 169, Smith 2003: 425, Ferri (late-Flavian: 2003a: 5–30; reviving Nordmeyer 1892: 257–317), and Boyle 2008: xvi.

³ Lucarini 2005: 263–284 has attempted to prove that the play was written after Tacitus and in imitation of the latter: he believes that *Octavia* was composed in the third or fourth century. The alleged proofs are feeble, and essentially boil down to a couple of passages in which *Octavia* is more allusive or obscure than Tacitus, and thus, in the author's view, derivative—an inflexible argument, which makes no allowance for the playwright's independent literary agenda. However, since *Octavia* reports historical details unknown to Tacitus, even on Lucarini's hypothesis, the playwright would still have to be thought of as combining Tacitus with first-century historical sources.

close adherence to Seneca's own practice in metrical composition makes it also unlikely that the play was composed in late antiquity: Prudentius's iambics in *Peristephanon*, for example, are very different from Seneca's, and the fourth-century grammarians' understanding of the tragic meters seems to have been at best vague, or inadequate.⁴

CONTENT

Octavia spans three days and dramatizes the divorce and banishment of Claudius's younger daughter Claudia Octavia, which took place between May and June AD 62. The three-day time span is obviously a dramatic convention: the real events developed over a longer period.⁵

The title heroine, Octavia, is given a central role in three scenes at the beginning of the play (1–272), in which, in lyrics and dialogue, the princess rehearses her misfortunes and her present prospects. She is vainly comforted by her nutrix, who fears retaliation if the princess will not relent in her hatred of Nero. Seneca, next onstage (377–436) after a long ode, laments the dangers of his exalted position, with black thoughts about the present times. Then, in a heated confrontation with Nero (437–592), he tries to dissuade the savage prince from divorcing, and from taking bloody measures against his kin. Yet, Nero is irredeemably in love with Poppaea, now expecting a child, and appoints the next day for the marriage. In the early hours of the new day (593–645), the ghost of Agrippina rises from the dead, casting her curse upon her murderous son and his forthcoming marriage. While the ceremony is in full swing (offstage), Octavia leaves the palace, rousing indignation in a chorus representing popular sentiment. They set out to storm the tyrant's palace (646–689).

Day three, dawn: A frightened Poppaea rushes out of her chambers, distraught. She recounts to her nurse a series of terrifying and enigmatic visions, in stark contrast to the pomp of the marriage ceremony held on the previous day (690–761). In the meantime, the people's uprising has reached its peak, as a messenger reports (780–805). Nero's soldiers, however, have no difficulty in restoring order. But the emperor's anger demands satisfaction. Planning to set the whole city on fire, he decrees the banishment of Octavia to an island, where the wretched princess will be executed (820–876).

⁴ Leonhardt 1989: 144, Ferri 2003a: 178.

⁵ For a discussion of the events as presented in the historical sources, see Ferri 2003a: 3f.

The play ends with Octavia's departure for the island of Pandateria before a chorus of commiserating citizens (877–983).

The action as narrated here is interrupted by five choral odes of differing lengths (at 273, 669, 762, 806, 877). As in *Ag.* and perhaps *Troad.* there are two choruses, although they are not normally on stage during the acts; uniquely, one of them has an active part in the drama, marching on the imperial palace of Nero in support of Octavia (669–689). The second chorus sings in the second half of the play: it seems to consist of courtiers, and celebrate the beauty of Poppaea (762–779) or deprecate the rebellion (806–819), but displays sympathy for Octavia when she finally reappears under guard to be led away (877–983).

Octavia is not constantly present, and in fact a significant portion of the play is taken over by other characters (Seneca, Nero, Agrippina, Poppaea). Only in the first scenes (1–272) is the focus of attention constantly on her feelings and states of mind. Octavia's role, here, is clearly modeled on Sophocles's uncompromising Electra (see *infra*: Sources). Indeed, there is a build-up of expectation that a climactic confrontation between the two protagonists, Nero and Octavia, will take place. Yet, Octavia's heroic stubbornness is an unrealized motif: her death sentence in the end is determined more by Nero's anger at the popular uprising than by Octavia's antagonizing of him. In the second half of the play, the pace of the action becomes more rapid, with an interesting montage of short scenes, which is un-Senecan and may have been characteristic of historical plays.⁶

PROBLEMS

Octavia is our single extant representative of the important dramatic genre of *fabulae praetextae*, that is, plays in which the characters are, in the main, historical figures. In fact, the impact and heritage of *praetextae* in the history of Roman drama are unclear, because the fragments are few, and mostly very short.⁷ It is likely, however, that some features of *Octavia* that clearly diverge from Seneca's or fifth-century Greek dramatic conventions, such as, most notably, the arrangement of the action over three successive days, go back to

⁶ Fitch 2004a: 509. Sutton 1983: 27–31 suggested the influence of mime. On the structure of *Octavia* generally, see also Boyle 2008: lix–lxvi.

⁷ The two most extensive modern discussions of the genre are Manuwald (2001: 259–305) and Kragelund (2002: 5–51). The pertinence of *Octavia* in the tradition of Republican *praetextae* is challenged in Schmidt 1985: 1421–1453.

the *praetextae* tradition, in which the accommodation of narratives of longer actions may have frequently entailed longer time lapses. *Praetextae* quite possibly also entailed frequent or conspicuous scene changes.⁸

The play is not clearly divided into acts, although such subdivisions were later introduced in the MSS, and in Trevet's medieval commentary.⁹ The playwright certainly knew of act divisions as a "rule" in the composition of serious drama; nevertheless, he adopted the three-day span as the predominant structural principle, and did not even bother to make days coincide with acts, most conspicuously at 592 f., where day two begins without an intervening choral ode.

The intended medium of the play, as for Senecan tragedy, is disputed. No ultimate proof can be given in support of either recitation or stage performance, be it at a private auditorium or in a large theater as part of public *ludi*.¹⁰ Performance at some public festival, however, seems ruled out by the absence of explicit panegyric elements (in the form of a prophecy, for example), which one would have expected in a play dealing with issues of imperial legitimacy and power. Kragelund (2005: 91–93) has argued strongly that the playwright was acquainted with the traditions of performed drama (as opposed to simply having a bookish knowledge of the theater), but even this proves nothing conclusively about the medium of *Octavia*.

Some critics see the first scenes (1–273) as set inside Octavia's own chambers. On a strictly "realistic" reading of the play other scenes must be imagined inside: the Seneca-Nero confrontation at 437–592, as well as the dialogues between Poppaea and her nutrix at 690–761 and the Nero-prefect scene at 820–876. A complete scene change is also envisaged sometimes in the play's finale, where Octavia is led away by Nero's guards (a harbor scene?).¹¹ On a different reading, the play's fluid setting is in line with the vagueness of Senecan dramas: the playwright has blurred the issue of location, adapting his scenes to a Senecan nondescript setting, and avoiding unambiguous references to interiors.

⁸ For action over successive days as a feature of *praetextae*, see Junge 1999: 167–169; Kragelund 2002: 41–43, with earlier discussions.

⁹ Ferri 2003a: 67 n. 167.

¹⁰ Wiseman 2001: 14 evocatively describes a performance in the theater of Marcellus, at the *ludi plebei* of November 68, a month after Galba's arrival in Rome.

¹¹ See discussions of the setting in Manuwald: 2001: 269–272; Kragelund 1999: 243–247, 2002: 45 f., 2005: 93–98; and Smith 2003: 412–416—all with references to earlier bibliography. According to Tac. *ann.* 14.63, Octavia was relegated to Campania, and departures for Pandateria (modern day Ventotene) are more likely to have been from some coastal port of southern Latium. Today's ferries leave from Anzio, Formia, Terracina, and Naples.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

The author of *Octavia* extensively borrowed from Seneca, not only from the tragedies, but also from his prose, mostly *De clementia* and *Consolatio ad Helviam* (reflected in Seneca's monologue at 377–436 and in the exchange with Nero at 437–592). The *ignotus*, however, was not a very able verbal artist. His periods are often stilted, the vocabulary repetitive, his verse endings monotonous. Some highly recognizable markers of Seneca's style, especially the pointed use of capping and sharp *sententiae*, in line with declamatory usage, are nearly absent from *Octavia*, but it is uncertain whether their absence should be ascribed to inadequacy on the part of the imitator or to a reaction against contemporary critiques of Seneca's own style. Another noticeable difference from Seneca is the highly affected deployment of particles and conjunctions after one or more words from the beginning of a sentence (for example, *saeuas mox et armauit manus* instead *et mox saeuas a. m.*: 418). This mannerism is alien in Seneca, and was probably adopted by the poet of *Octavia* as an emphatic marker of high poetic style.¹²

TRANSMISSION

Octavia was transmitted only in the so-called A, or “interpolated,” family of Senecan MSS. Although the play is certainly an ancient text, not a medieval concoction, the date of its inclusion in the Senecan corpus is uncertain. The A-branch of the tragedies arose in late antiquity, when Seneca was still widely read.¹³ The tragedies, however, fell into relative oblivion in the early Middle Ages, and we owe their survival to a single lost MS in minuscule script, of unknown provenance, which started being copied again between the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, probably in northern France.¹⁴ The suspicion has been advanced that *Octavia* was included in the corpus at about this time.¹⁵ It is, however, unlikely for a tragedy of this kind to have been transmitted alone: its survival was assured only by the ascription

¹² Language and style generally: Ferri 2003a: 31–40.

¹³ The establishment of the two families of MSS in late antiquity is proved by quotations and imitations exhibiting errors of either branch: Zwierlein 1983: 20–39. A fragment of a parchment codex leaf from Egypt may exhibit a conjunctive error of A, thus helping to establish a fourth-century *terminus ante quem* for the division of the two branches: Markus and Schwendner 1997: 76.

¹⁴ On the early stages of the A tradition: Herington 1958, Rouse 1971.

¹⁵ MacGregor 1978: 103 f.

to Seneca and by its inclusion in the corpus, which must have occurred very early on. No certain quotation of *Octavia* in indirect sources is found until the thirteenth century, when the transmission of Senecan tragedy underwent a resurgence of interest. In late antique authors, only insecure echoes in Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae* have been identified.¹⁶

SOURCES

The playwright of *Octavia* was deeply steeped in an imitation of Senecan drama: the echoes of Seneca in *Octavia* form one of the earliest chapters in the reception history of Senecan tragedy. Imitation of other authors is predominantly from Vergil and Ovid (and Lucan of near contemporaries), mainly in the anapaestic sections, where the metrical layout made adaptations from hexametric lines easier. The debt to other Latin dramatic models is difficult to assess, considering the loss of almost all tragic production from Republican and Augustan times. The influence of Augustan tragedy, however, may have been important, because it is virtually certain that the tragic trimeter adopted by Seneca was already used by dramatists of the Augustan period, and perhaps also the de facto limitation of lyric verse to anapaests.¹⁷

One conspicuous feature of intertextual practice in *Octavia* is the sustained imitation of fifth-century Greek tragic texts: extensive adaptations of Sophocles's *Electra* and *Antigone* have long been recognized.¹⁸ The author probably read the Greek models in the original, rather than in the existing Latin translations.

The issue of the historical sources is imbricated with that of the date. Ferri (2003a: 9–16) has argued that the recourse to, and dependance on, historical narratives is recognizable in the close adherence of the story as narrated in the play to extant historical accounts, especially when the play includes material that had no intrinsic place in the *Octavia* narrative, or reveals a political interpretation, which we may suspect to have been elaborated in the course of time by professional historians. This point, however, has been disputed by Kragelund (2005: 69–78) and Wiseman (2005: 59–69).

¹⁶ See more details in Ferri 2003a: 78f.

¹⁷ For imitation of Seneca and the Augustan poets, see Ferri 2003b, 2003a: 46–50, 408–412.

¹⁸ On *Electra*, see Ladek 1909: 189–199; on *Antigone*, Ferri 1998: 339–356.

RECEPTION

The most successful descendant of *Octavia* in later drama is Busenello's libretto for Monteverdi's *Incoronazione di Poppea* (1643).¹⁹ *Octavia*, however, had attracted great interest from the early days of the late medieval rediscovery of Senecan tragedy, in particular for its historical contents, which were a unique source of knowledge before Tacitus came into the hands of Florentine scholars (from Boccaccio onward). One of the pre-humanist Italian Seneca scholars, Albertino Mussato, wrote a Latin *Ecerinis* (1314/1315?), a historical play on the Italian prince Ezzelino da Romano, which draws extensively on *Octavia*. Outside Italy, the debt of the Tudor and Elizabethan drama tradition to Seneca is well known.²⁰ In the earliest English tragedy, Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* (1561), the first scene is clearly borrowed from *Octavia*; later on, Thomas Gwinne's 5,000-line Latin play *Nero* (1603), although based predominantly on Tacitus, exhibits clear points of contact with *Octavia*.²¹

¹⁹ Wilson 2003c: 70f. See the extensive discussion of the borrowings from *Octavia* in Busenello's libretto in Conte 2004: 21–29. On *Octavia* and later drama generally, see Boyle 2008: lxxv–lxxxvi.

²⁰ General studies: Boas 1914, Cunliffe 1912. For a brief outline of the modern reception of *Octavia*, see Wilson 2003b: 2.

²¹ For an ample study of the *Nero* see D.F. Sutton's edition at <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/Nero>.

PART THREE

TRAGEDY

Topics

SPACE AND TIME IN SENECA'S DRAMA

Ernst A. Schmidt

INTRODUCTION: PROGRAM

For drama and theatrical performance the connection of space and time is immediately evident. The action takes place on the stage, a spatial receptacle, and it is a process in time. These basic conditions exist independently of how a play is received, whether it is read or seen in a performance, or whether the author intended it for reading, recitation, or stage production. The reader (or audience of a recitation) imagines the space and time of the play, envisioning mentally either the stage action itself or the space and time signified by it. I believe the stage character of Seneca's dramas ought to be acknowledged in terms not only of their stageability but also of their intended mode of reception, with the playwright's intention being laid down in the text. However, the following discussion is meant as a help for any reader, regardless of his¹ stance on the question of performance. The reading at the basis of the subsequent observations endeavors to be that of both an ideal stage director and of an ideal reader (or listener) with some theater experience.

After a preliminary section on implicit performance directions, the chapter has two parts devoted to space and time, respectively. The part on space first discusses some specific aspects and then analyzes the semantics of dramatic space; the part on time again deals first with technical aspects and then considers the character of dramatic time.

¹ Each "his" and "he" of this type should be understood as meaning "his or her," "she or he"; the traditional forms are chosen to avoid the stylistic clumsiness and pedantry of the politically correct expression.

1. IMPLICIT PERFORMANCE DIRECTIONS: SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL ASPECTS

Ancient drama lacks explicit stage directions, the additional remarks we find in modern plays (and present-day translations of Seneca: cf., e.g., Häuptli 2003) as part of the side text (as opposed to the main text).² Nevertheless, even an ancient dramatic text is a theater script, "eine [...] schriftlich fixierte Anweisung für das Aufführungsgeschehen" (Matzat 1982: 13), or the "libretto of a performance" (Taplin 1977: 25), regardless of whether an actual performance is intended or one that emerges in the imaginative mind of a reader. Where the dramatist wants to fix his stage intention he puts it into the main text,³ the speeches (or songs) and replies (German: Repliken) of the figures,⁴ or the chorus. (There may be cases where he leaves the specific form of realization to the stage director or where specification is unnecessary because of the contemporary theatrical practice.) It is these inserted instructions that I term "implicit performance directions"⁵ (hereafter without "implicit") instead of the usual "stage directions" because I wish to make a terminological distinction between "stage direction" in a narrower sense and "figure direction." "Stage directions" include instructions for the backdrop of the stage, the wings, stage machines, props, implements, costumes, and make-up. The term "figure direction" subsumes the entries and exits, movements, postures, gestures, and actions of the figures. This division corresponds to the difference between the factors that prepare the physical background of the play and those that are elements of the dramatic action. It corresponds also to a dichotomy of spatial and temporal phenomena. Thus,

² For "main text" and "side text" ("Haupt-" and "Nebentext") cf. Pfister 1997: 35–41. The side text also includes the title, the list of *dramatis personae*, and the place and date of the fictional action.

³ Again, whether addressed to a stage director or to the reader's imagination; in what follows this will not be repeated.

⁴ Following contemporary (German) drama theory, the term "figure" ("Figur") is preferred to "character" or "(dramatis) persona"; "figure" and "actor" are strictly distinguished.

⁵ Cf. Pfister 1997: 37 f. under the heading "Implizite Inszenierungsanweisungen im Haupttext": "[...] die Bühnenaktion des antiken Dramas oder des Dramas der Shakespearezeit [ist] weitgehend aus den Repliken der Bühnenfiguren erschließbar." Cf. also Matzat 1982: 13: "Der Haupttext, der sich aus den Repliken der Figuren zusammensetzt, schreibt den Schauspielern vor, was sie zu sagen haben, der Nebentext gibt Hinweise auf die begleitenden Handlungen, auf die weiteren situativen Umstände und den Einsatz der verschiedenen Theaterrmittel, wobei vieles davon immer auch schon im Haupttext impliziert ist. Natürlich ist der dramatische Text als Vorschrift immer lückenhaft und muß bei der konkreten Inszenierungsarbeit entsprechend ergänzt werden."

for example, a costume is put on by the actor before the performance, and it is also something spatial, independent of dramatic time, whereas the handing over of a garment on stage and the receiver's putting it on are acts in time, performed by the figures.

For both the figure and stage directions the following subdivision is helpful. The descriptions that function as instructions of these types differ according to their temporal relation to the stage action. They may precede their realization, accompany it, or occur only later in the text, after the corresponding action has taken place. Thus they can be distinguished as prospective, simultaneous or concomitant, and retrospective. However, such a subdivision does not apply to those stage directions that constitute the dramatic space as a whole and all its permanent features. Although the instructions referring to the fixed settings of the stage occur only in the course of the action, coming necessarily after the scene has already been installed, this temporal relation has nothing to do with dramatic time: A figure's remark does not designate the work of the technical stage personnel in setting up the scenic equipment in the sense of a preceding event of the dramatic action. Therefore, these stage directions are not subsumed under retrospective directions. On the other hand, for scene changes that occur during the action we do find simultaneous stage directions (e.g., *Phaedr.* 384: *Sed en, patescunt regiae fastigia*), prospective ones (e.g., *Thy.* 901b–908: *Turba famularis, fores / templi relaxa, festa patefiat domus. [...]*), and retrospective ones (e.g., *Thy.* 1038, Thyestes's words: *abscisa cerno capita* (where, of course, a preceding action of a figure, viz. that of Atreus or of one of his attendants, is retrospectively specified).

The study of Seneca's technique in applying performance directions reveals their importance. Since there is no side text for the stage and its apparatus before Act I, the elements of their description are scattered throughout the (main) text, where they occur at the occasion of their dramatic functionalizing. A stage director must study the whole text before he can begin rehearsals and talk with the stage designer and technical staff. He will attempt to transform his findings into pictorial and spatial stage elements, immobile props, costumes, entrances and exits, movements, gestures, and extralinguistic action. The reader expects to get all the necessary information in the course of his reading, although he may not be able to grasp the full picture in his first perusal. The classical scholar should programmatically apply the methodical reading of a stage director ("performance criticism") and the imagination of a watchful reader.

Performance directions have a double function. As elements of the communication between the figures of the action they belong to the system

of interior communication. At the same time, they are instructions directed at the stage director and the reader and thus also form part of the system of exterior communication.⁶

Among the figure directions the retrospective ones have been neglected both in the more general literature on drama and in the scholarship on Seneca (nothing in Pfister 1997 or in Sutton 1986). Braun (1982), however, did recognize the procedure in Seneca's plays, using it as proof of their stage character. Comparing an example from Plautus, *Amphitruo*, and a striking case in Aeschylus, *Persae*,⁷ he assembles analogous examples in Seneca. One is *Medea* 974 f.: "Erst hier im Rückblick wird dem Leser klar, daß Medea V. 970 f. den ersten Sohn gemordet hat" ("Only now, in looking back, the reader realizes that Medea has killed her first son in lines 970 f.", Braun 1982: 9; cf., however, below p. 535). Stroh (1994: 259 f. on *Tro.* 945–948) saw that the words *mortem putabat illud* contain a "subsequent" or "retroactive" ("nachträglich") performance direction, regarding this as "einen sicheren Beweis dafür, daß Seneca [dieses Stück] für die Bühne geschrieben hat" ("clear evidence that Seneca wrote [this play] for the stage").⁸

The most common type of retrospective figure direction is the request one figure directs at another to end an action or position or to return to an initial posture where the playwright has not previously designated the beginning of that action or attitude. One does not need much dramaturgical acumen to conclude from the order "Get up (again)!" that the figure addressed had bent his knees and is kneeling at the moment. The author thus instructs the stage director or actor that the figure addressed must have assumed that posture at some previous point. As a rule that beginning can be located in the text, either at a definite point or somewhere within a passage. By their very nature these retrospective figure directions are at the same time also prospective.

Prospective figure directions are mostly commands, requests, or declarations of intent. Yet this is only true for those cases where the command is evidently obeyed (e.g., orders addressed to servants) or where the request is translated into action (cf., e.g., *Tro.* 492b: *amove testes doli*). In cases where only the subsequent text clarifies whether the command has been executed

⁶ For "interior" and "exterior communication" ("inneres" and "äußeres Kommunikationssystem"), cf. Pfister 1997: 20–22.

⁷ Braun 1982: 13. Taplin (1977: 30 n. 2, and 70–79) denied the existence of implicit retrospective performance directions in Aeschylus. For an example from the *Persae*, cf. Arnott 1989: 135.

⁸ In both cases, those of Braun and Stroh, I prefer to regard the stage character as a "plausible inference"; the notion of "Beweis" ("proof"), in its cogency, overtaxes the evidence.

or not, it is the combination of the order and the action that make up the complete figure direction. Take, as an example, *Hercules furens* 1229b–1296 (Braun 1982: 9 f.): The hero, awaking from his mania, asks for his weapons. But nobody fulfils this order, for he repeats his request again and again, and only in v. 1295a does he get them back. (Each renewed request is at the same time a retrospective figure direction prescribing disobedience in the previous sequence.)

Simultaneous figure directions either accompany an action of the figure whose words contain such an implicit instruction (therefore dubbed “concomitant”), or they occur in observations, descriptions, pointers (often connected with an explanation or interpretation from the figure’s perspective). Concomitant speaking accompanies a non-linguistic action of the speaker, as in *Troades* 691b–693 (Andromacha): *Ad genua accido / supplex, Ulixē, [...]*. It is often connected with deixis: *Herc.f.* 370b–371a (Lycus): *pignus hoc fidei cape: / contingē dextram*. (The immediately following simultaneous figure direction—*quid truci vultu siles?* [371b]—is evidence that the request is not also a prospective direction.)

Entry announcements are the most common type of simultaneous figure directions (Taplin 1977: 71). Often *ecce* underscores their simultaneity with the action, as in *Hercules furens* 329–331. There is no formal equivalent for exit announcements (“exit cues”); instead, we find prospective figure directions (declarations of intent, errands), as in *Hercules furens* 915–917. Another important occurrence of simultaneous or concomitant figure directions, occasionally also a nearly imperceptible precedence or prospective quality, may be observed in connection with murder on stage: The action spoken of accompanies the words and follows them in mute play. Thus, Cassandra in the middle of *Agamemnon* 1012, after Clytemestra’s half line—*Furiosa, morere* (simultaneous and prospective figure direction)—receives the deadly stroke from the queen, and, dying, utters the last half line of the drama: *Veniet et vobis furor* (1012b). Medea kills her first son in the middle of *Medea* 969b–971a, her second son between lines 1018 and 1019. In *Oedipus*, Iocasta thrusts Oedipus’s sword into her womb. The blow and her death occur between lines 1039 and 1040. Here and in *Phaedra* the order directed at the speaking figure herself, *morere*, is uttered at a certain interval before the lethal blow (*Oed.* 1027, *Phaedr.* 1184).

2. DRAMATIC SPACE

2.1. *Specific Aspects*2.1.1. *Deixis*

(Spatial) deixis may be one of the markers of performance directions. When deictics occur, the interpreter of the text must decide whether (a) the object pointed at is visible on stage (e.g., a prop, a figure, an action); (b) whether there is a case of the so-called “Wortkulisse” (verbal backdrop or side scene), a “description” of spatial or pictorial stage elements given from the perspective of a figure and thus, in principle, subjective;⁹ or (c) whether the phenomenon is an instance of the so-called “Deixis am Phantasma” (deixis to something not at all locally present). Only (a) is a performance direction.

It is perfectly possible to understand *Troades* 15–17 as a stage direction (a). However, in the course of her monologue, Hecuba’s “description” (15–27) of the walls and towers glides into (b)—imagination or imagined supplementation of her observation (verbal backdrop)—somewhere after v. 16a. As in every verbal utterance, deixis to a phantasma can occur in the speeches and replies of dramatic figures. In general, distinguishing between (a), (b), and (c) is not difficult. Thus, in *Troades* 418–425 it is beyond doubt that the deictic *hic* can only designate the boy Astyanax as a figure who must be standing closely beside Andromacha; this *hic* is the figure direction retrospectively given to the actor for his entry and his stage presence. In contradistinction, *Troades* 57–62 (with *ecce* and *en*) is clearly deixis to a phantasma. This is evident because the lottery has already taken place (which the queen does not know). The present tense predicates she uses (*sortitur* etc.) after her statement *non tamen superis sat est* (56b; not “*fuit*”) do not assert simultaneity (and present time), but envisage an event announced in the past and looming in the present. For the system of exterior communication, Hecuba’s

⁹ Whenever spatial elements are “described” in a drama, it is possible that the reference of this “observation” is not visible on stage but rather to be imagined by the viewer. Pfister (1997: 38, 351f.) calls such a “spoken space” (“gesprochenen Raum”) “Wortkulisse” (verbal backdrop). It is the “Thematisierung des räumlichen Kontexts in den Repliken der Figuren” and not to be understood as “Anweisung an den Bühnenbildner”. Stage realization, as demanded by the dramatist, and verbal backdrop cannot be distinguished for specific occurrences either systematically or interpretatively, only historically. Verbal backdrop as an imaginative supplementation of the visible stage defines the space of the stage from within in a similar way as the imagined offstage characterizes that space from the outside. Both, verbal backdrop and offstage, dramatic space imagined or presented only from the perspective of a figure, are spaces fraught with meaning and contribute to the semantization of the visible space of the stage.

deixis at an action, imagined for the present moment or fearfully anticipated in vivid presentation, provides information about an important element of the plot on which the apprehensions of the Trojan women are focused.

2.1.2. *Mobile Props and Costumes*

The actors wear masks and costumes that designate their sex, age, social status, and walk of life. For the theater dress of the imperial time Lucian gives testimony of breast and belly stuffing.¹⁰ If it is legitimate to suppose the same practice also for the Neronian period,¹¹ this would make it easier for male actors to bare female breasts in presenting a wailing group in the amoibaion of Hecuba and the women of the chorus in *Troades* 106 and 120 f.

In both ancient and modern theater one has to take into account that the visible and audible events on stage occasionally go beyond what is expressed in words. The following observation points at such a practice. In Seneca's dramas there are four epiphanies of dead figures from Hades, *Thyestis umbra* in *Agamemnon*, Act I, *Tantali umbra* at the same place in *Thyestes*, Laius's shade in *Oedipus* and Achilles's in *Troades*. The first two are visibly present on stage, the last two belong to offstage events and are referred to only in messenger reports. Only there do we find a description of the shades (*Oed.* 619–626a, *Tro.* 168–190). There is good reason, then, not only for the imaginative reader but also for a stage director to use these descriptions as if they were also stage directions for the Hades shades in *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes*, where the figures have no motive to describe what is seen by everybody.

Mobile props such as utensils and weapons constitute central elements of the action in some plays, above all Hippolytus's sword in *Phaedra* (Braun 1982: 3 f. with n. 7)¹² and Hercules's weapons in his tragedy, visible instruments of the murder of his sons and his wife. The text (script) of the murder scene in Act IV (987–1026a) gives simultaneous figure directions throughout. At the end of the act the hero falls asleep. His weapons are removed, apparently together with the servants' and Amphitryon's exit. In Act V, noticing the absence of his weapons (1150b–1155), he demands they be returned, until he finally receives them from Amphitryon (1295a: *reddo arma*, concomitant figure direction).

¹⁰ Luc., *de salt.* 27; *Iupp. trag.* 41.

¹¹ Zwierlein (1966: 38 n. 1) does so (believing then in stage performances in Seneca's times) but draws the opposite conclusion for *Tro.*

¹² Cf. also Dingel 1970; Coffey and Mayer 1990: 17.

Further stage properties are sacrificial animals, puppets, and parts of puppets (corpses and limbs). The visible presence of victims is necessary in *Hercules furens* 1040–1042a (after 893f. 898f.) and *Oedipus* 299–303, 334b–387. Whereas in *Hercules furens* the sacrifice is not executed because the fit of mania prevents it, in *Oed.* the spectator witnesses the bloody sacrifice of a bull and a heifer with subsequent divination from the entrails (Arnott 1959). In four of the seven complete authentic tragedies, puppets or parts of such are used to represent corpses or limbs (*Med.*, *Phaedr.*, *Herc.f.*, *Thy.*).¹³ For *Thyestes*, Braun (1982: 6–8) has demonstrated that the visible props are mandatory for an immediate understanding, a pointer to the intention of scenic realization. After his gruesome meal, Thyestes asks for his sons repeatedly, until, in the end, Atreus tells him (1004b–1005): *Expedi amplexus, pater; / venere. natos ecquid agnoscis tuos?*, whereupon Thyestes exclaims (1006a): *Agnosco fratrem*. What is unintelligible at this moment from the textual evidence alone is visible in ghastly presence on the stage: Atreus has shown him the boys' cut-off heads, hands, and feet. Not until Thyestes' words in vv. 1038f.—*abscisa cerno capita et avulsas manus / et rupta fractis cruribus vestigia*—does the reader get the retrospective performance direction.

2.2. General Aspects

2.2.1. Stage with Fixed Stage Properties and Offstage

"Dramatic space" denotes the sum of localities of the dramatic action: the stage with its backdrop, wings, and properties as well as the imagined space around it, insofar as it is connected with the action. With the exception of the side that is open to the audience, the rectangular stage, as the scene of the visible action, is surrounded on its sides by the fictional space of invisible and, in most cases, inaudible events. The total of these spaces is generally referred to as offstage. Some observations suggest a subdivision. The space behind the rear of the stage is occupied by buildings; the backdrop that separates it from the stage therefore gives the illusion of the front wall(s) of a palace or house(s) with doors. Accordingly, actions behind the stage are imagined as taking place in closed rooms or beyond the building(s). Entries from one of the doors must be understood as from the interior of a building. In contradistinction to this offstage space, the events and

¹³ Artificial blood as color and substance may be added to round the list off (e.g., *Herc.* 1194a; *Oed.* 345f. 377). Cf. Sutton 1986: 23. 63–67.

actions of the lateral spaces take place at a greater distance, at places to and from which streets and paths are imagined.

Entrances from the rear may occur immediately after the events that have taken place there, whereas entrances from the sides follow upon non-scenic events only after an interval. As a rule the figures on stage and the spectators are informed about offstage events through a messenger's report, the account of a past event. If the space at one of the lateral wings is to be imagined as open to view from the stage, the narration of events taking place there can take the form of a *teichoscopia*; in that case a simultaneous action is imagined as being observed and related. Simultaneous offstage action in the building behind the stage occurs only as an exception: Cassandra in a prophetic vision through the walls of the palace reports the murder of Agamemnon as it happens (*Ag.* 867–907).

A place of action, of the origin of events, or of the locality from which a figure enters can also be imagined below the stage: the underworld. The spectator imagines no space of action in front of the stage. There is, however, one important exception: The *cavea* is included when the dramatic action affects the sky and infects the world, thus itself becoming cosmic (Rosenmeyer 1989; Schmitz 1993). This space of a world that corresponds and reacts to the dramatic events, a world in which stage and *cavea* converge under the same sky, could be called "sympathetic space."¹⁴

The space of the stage is constituted not only by the rectangular ground plan, the backdrop, and the wings (scenography) but also by permanent and fixed (immobile) stage properties such as altars, statues, and tombs. These spatial elements must be taken into account for a complete assessment of a play's dramatic space.

2.2.2. *Spatial Semantics*

The guiding question of this section is: In what way does the space of a drama take part in its dramatic meaning and contribute to it? Actors on the stage are understood (meant) as figures, a painted backdrop signifies a palace's façade: Should space then remain without meaning? The hypothesis of meaningful dramatic space, of its "semantization" (Pfister 1997), will be considered as proven if such analyses deliver plausible results that enrich and deepen our understanding of the plays. A consequence of the demonstration

¹⁴ A spatial notion both between and embracing "offstage" and "sympathetic space" is the "*scenografia verbale*" of described landscapes that are connected with framing events of the action (Rosati 2002: 226).

of “topographical semantics,” not dealt with here, is the semiotic quality of space and spatial elements. Since these have the character of dramatic signs, topographical semantics is accompanied by topographical semiotics.

In all of Seneca’s plays, the space of the stage is directly or indirectly semanticized in the first act. Three briefly sketched examples must suffice.¹⁵ Hippolytus’s hunting monody in front of the royal palace in Athens (inferred from Phaedra’s entry in the next scene) opens *Phaedra*. The prince’s praise of the Attic woodlands outlines a “Gegenwelt,” an alternative to the world represented by the stage. The countryside around Athens, the offstage, takes on a symbolical meaning, and with it the stage is also semanticized. Actions in this place will be alien to Hippolytus. His exit aria forms a backdrop for Phaedra, who enters the same place in the next scene. This is not a natural space in the pragmatic sense that it has just been left by Hippolytus. It is the symbol of a world to which he does not want to belong and from which disaster will overcome him. The identity of the place in these two scenes, left by the prince (whom the playwright had enter the stage for no other reason than to show him leaving it) and entered by his stepmother, is a clear exposition of the tragic events that follow: Phaedra’s love is impossible because their worlds are irreconcilable.

The first appearance of the eponymous hero and of Iocasta in *Oedipus* provide information about the stage. The scene is in front of the royal palace in Thebes. The early morning sun, rising with some hesitation, his luminous mane clad in sorrow by a sordid cloud, will behold a city with houses deserted because of the plague and strewn with corpses. The king is haunted by fears and forebodings. And when we behold him lying on the ground in front of the altar, whose gods he apostrophizes as *o saeva nimium numina* (75a), the space of the stage has taken on the symbolical meaning of a vessel of calamity, ominous for Oedipus who fearfully sees himself as *Phoebe reus* (34b).

In *Tro.* the lateral offstage is the victors’ camp. The backdrop is not a building but the broken walls of burning Troy, and no entry occurs from there. This exception among Seneca’s plays endows the space of the stage with the meaning of defeat and abandonment. The Trojan women find themselves in a place between their lost homes and the sea, between a past they are cut off from and the path to slavery. Moreover, the space of the stage is semantically, even emblematically, defined by Hector’s tomb (cf. Act III, esp. 483–488, the

¹⁵ For fuller analyses of the openings of *Ag.*, *Phaedr.*, *Oed.*, *Med.*, *Tro.*, cf. Schmidt 2004a: 345–349.

stage direction for a fixed stage property applying to the whole play), the visible focus of the drama's central antithesis Hector-Achilles.

The stage of Senecan drama, a natural and geometrical space in the technical and choreographical sense of an area in front of the backdrop with stage props, movements, and constellations of the figures, is at the same time transformed into a space of meaning, into an emblematic sign or system of signs. One important corollary of such a complete semantization is the fact that the unity of space is not so much the outcome or condition of the unity of action; rather, its crucial function is to make the central meaning of the play palpable and to steep the action in the same atmosphere throughout.

3. DRAMATIC TIME

3.1. *Specific Aspects*

3.1.1. *The Time of the Asides*

An aside proper in ancient drama, including Senecan tragedy (where it is a frequent device), is an utterance by a figure in the presence of another with the intention of not being heard or understood by that figure. According to theatrical convention, it is heard not at all or indistinctly or is not understood by the interlocutor, but it is heard and understood by the spectator according to the playwright's intention (Schmidt 2000). As such it is a kind of soliloquy, which for some time, in most cases only a short while, interrupts the dramatic communication and may also signal the desire for non-communication. Therefore, forming part of the action on stage, it is a phenomenon in time, and it takes up time. Another and much rarer type of speech, considered by Tarrant (1978: 242–246; misrepresenting the asides in *Tro.*, Act III) to be the true and fully developed conventional aside and characterized by him as accompanied by a “suspension of dramatic time” or by what Bain (1977: 70) called “freezing of the action,” does not constitute an aside proper and is not found in Senecan drama. Taking time means that the figure not only needs time for the words of the aside but the time of the whole action continues to pass during an aside, including, of course, the time of the interlocutor. Therefore, the assumption of suspension of dramatic time and “frozen action” is paradoxical. Coincidence of dramatic and real time is the necessary condition of the aside proper. The observation that there are cases where the interlocutor does not even notice the very fact of an aside does not amount to the speaker's dropping out of dramatic or real time or out of his existence and the dramatic action. The intention of the speaker of an aside to conceal his utterance can only aim at a figure occupying the same

space and time. Seneca's dramatic technique endeavors to make palpable the passing of time during an aside. Thus the speaker of the aside may describe the simultaneous behavior of the interlocutor or vice versa (simultaneous figure direction).¹⁶

3.1.2. *Breaks and Dumb Show*

Both the attentive stage director and the imaginative reader will fill the three missing half lines in Seneca's dramas with dumb show (*Phaedr.* 605, *Tro.* 1103, *Thy.* 100). They cannot but regard these textual "lacunae" as indicating passing time and the need for an action. This is even implicitly prescribed in the first (retrospective figure direction: *Phaedr.* 606) and third instances (the mute play and its impact as described by the Fury; figure directions of all three temporal aspects: *Thy.* 101–105a). However, textual lacunae are not necessary to direct the recipient of the script to supplementing the words with extralinguistic mute or mimic play.¹⁷ He does it whenever verses and phrases are separated by more than a pause for the speaker to take breath or for the person addressed to grasp the meaning of what was said, when the temporal and pragmatic relation of two successive utterances will make him feel a lapse in time and a leap in the action.¹⁸ The following are cases in point:¹⁹ In *Tro.* 351b f. / 353–359, Agamemnon orders Calchas to be summoned and addresses the seer in the verses immediately following. The gap between the two actions is clearly to be imagined or to be staged as filled by the actions of servants who call Calchas and return with him.²⁰ *Oedipus* 299–383 is exemplary in evidencing the quality of the text as a bare theater script for visible stage action to accompany the words of the figures. Manto does not tell her blind father that she has executed his orders, but announces that she has always anticipated them in her actions. Tiresia's orders, which at first seem to be prospective figure instructions, are in fact simultaneous or even retrospective.

Dumb show, accompanied by the description given by another figure,²¹ shows the influence of the pantomime, an expressional mimic dance in vogue in Seneca's times (Zimmermann 1990, Stroh 1994: 260). When a

¹⁶ Asides of this type are described in Schmidt 2000: 420–427.

¹⁷ In the juncture "mute play," the attributive "mute" does not mean "without voice," but only "without articulated speech."

¹⁸ Cf. Sutton 1986: 28: "We must take into account the possibility that two lines immediately juxtaposed in a dramatic text may in fact be separated by significant bits of dumb-show."

¹⁹ Criticized by Zwierlein 1966: 29–38.

²⁰ For other realizations, cf. Steidle 1968: 58 n. 85 and Stroh 1994: 257.

²¹ Criticized by Zwierlein 1966: 45–51 and 56–63.

simultaneous mute action of this type is observed and described, this utterance is truly dramatic speech. As a linguistic performance it interprets an extralinguistic event (cf. *Tro.* 945–948), and as an interpretative description it is given from the perspective of a dramatic figure, typical of that person's character and relation to the action. Examples are Andromacha and Hecuba in *Troades*, Act IV or the nurse in *Medea* 380–396, where she describes the simultaneous raging of her mistress. As in *Troades*, Act IV, the speech serves as a simultaneous figure direction for the actor who dances the action.

3.2. *The Character of Dramatic Time*

Shelton (1975) has argued that the opening scenes of *Hercules furens* and *Thyestes* do not form part of the temporal order in which the subsequent acts come to pass²² and that the actions of *Hercules furens*, Act II not only do not follow in time upon the events of Act I but even precede them. She therefore speaks of a “distortion of time” or “temporal confusion” and of “two points of perspective of the dramatic events”; Seneca “has manipulated the dramatic time” and “allowed the audience to witness (the same event) twice” from different perspectives. Her article amounts to the thesis that in *Thyestes* and *Hercules furens* the relation of Act I to Acts II/III–V is one of temporal simultaneity. However, there is reason for recognizing in the observed peculiarities of these two latest complete plays (according to Fitch 1981) specific cases and late forms of a general characteristic of this playwright's dramas: the πάντα ὅμω, the whole piece in the prologue, as Friedländer (1931) put it. The coincidence of the events of the opening scene and the rest of the play should not be explained as a manipulation or distortion of time; instead of a (temporal) simultaneity, the coincidence of meaning should be recognized. The structure of these late plays and the other earlier ones is more analogous to the character and meaning of succession in music and lyric; the significance of natural time for the sequence of acts and scenes is thus reduced. The succession of opening and further acts is not a chronological-causal sequence of actions, but a sequel for the sympathizing, responding, and understanding spectator. Act I and the following acts interpret each other without, however, becoming interchangeable. The first act is a basis and a starting point comparable to an overture. How then are Act I or Scene 1 present in the following acts? (“Presence,” of course, does not here mean coextensive simultaneity in natural time).

²² For the “spatiotemporal indeterminateness” of Senecan prologues, cf. also Heldmann 1974: 10–15, 56–62 and Mantovanelli 1992.

Not all the plays can be analyzed here; these are observations on three selected plays.²³ Act I of *Agamemnon*, the earliest piece, albeit still in the tradition of the expository prologue, cannot be separated from Act I of the late *Thyestes*. The *umbra Thyestis* describes and explains the scene, provides information about the past, and represents himself as the source of the events to follow (having sired Aegisthus). He has knowledge of the imminent events, using for their predicates future- and present-tense forms. He apostrophizes Aegisthus the very moment before the murder, goading him on to the act (49b–52). Present-tense phrases and apostrophe would be simultaneous with actions of the following acts, if it were a question here of real presents in natural time and of real address. But, as utterances of the shade, they combine a ghost's prescience, the future represented as presence (German: "Vergegenwärtigung"), with symbolical presence and coincidence; as a consequence, Thyestes's monologue remains present in the following events. This is palpable especially in Aegisthus's first speech (e.g., 226–238), in the only scene in which Agamemnon appears (782–807), and in Cassandra's visionary "teichoscopia" (873: *video* as *Thyestis umbra* v. 46).

In *Medea*, the title heroine of Act I is not the same as the woman who appears directly after the first song of the chorus; the Medea of Act II and the following acts knows nothing of the entry monologue (Anliker 1960: 35–44). In the first scene, we encounter the Medea of the drama as a whole, the emblem also of the tradition. Her going beyond all criminal acts hitherto committed and the murder of Jason's bride and father-in-law are explicitly present, the infanticide is ominously implied in vv. 22a/3b–26a. Regarded in its relation to the dramatic action, her opening monologue appears to be similar to Juno's in *Hercules furens* and to the appearance of Tantalus's shade with the Fury in *Thyestes*. It can be seen as a development from Oedipus's opening monologue to the form of the first acts of the latest dramas.

In *Troades*, the first scene, with Hecuba's monologue and the *amoibaion* between the chorus of the captive women and the royal widow, bears a structural resemblance to Hippolytus's monody in *Phaedra*, Act I. The women's lament introduces the condition of Troy after the conquest, without being the exposition of the dramatic action (Owen 1970: 118). The temporal relation of the opening scene to the following acts cannot be defined; we are not asked to consider it as having such a relation. The play begins with an

²³ For fuller analyses of all the plays, cf. Schmidt 2004a: 323–328. Much of what has been seen by Shelton and by Schmidt was developed from Anliker 1960.

emblem;²⁴ before the pragmatic and chronological-causal exposition of the dramatic action the playwright has positioned an emblematic exposition.

What has been observed for the relationship between Act I or the first scene and the following acts can also be the case between other acts and scenes of a play (Shelton 1975: 267 n. 9; Schmidt 2004a: 329–331). It is true that as a rule the temporal order of earlier and later events is maintained. But subsequent scenes need not necessarily constitute a temporal continuity with the preceding scenes nor be related to them pragmatically. That is the case above all in *Troades* and *Thyestes*, as has been shown in two impressive studies (Owen 1968 and 1970). The sequence of scenes is due not to a temporal-causal succession, but to the intention of their mutual mirroring.

In the other plays such relations are connected with the temporal order of pragmatic continuity. But that is not the main principle of the sequence. The scenes shed light on one another, what comes earlier and what later is partly conditioned by communication with the spectator. The very fact of occasional disregard to the temporal order of parts of the action results in a new structure of the Senecan drama as a whole: In the end it can no longer be characterized in temporal categories. On the other hand, the assumption of (temporal) simultaneity of actions presented one after the other cannot explain their order. Owen (1970: 121–124, 137), who still describes the structure of *Troades* in such terms, nevertheless discovers in Seneca a “basic revolution in the concept of dramatic time and action” and finds that his “novel dramaturgy” suggests “a kind of surrealistic production working primarily through symbolic action and character within a mental setting.”

The result of this probing into the dramatic time of Seneca's tragedies raises the question of whether the basic concept of Attic tragedy, the *μία ἡμέρα* (Schwindt 1994: 193 f.), the day's span for the tragic action, is still relevant. Two observations suggest an answer in the affirmative: (i) Some plays begin before daybreak or at dawn (*Ag.* 53–56, *Oed.* 1–5, *Tro.* 170 f., *Herc. f.* 123–136, *Thy.* 120 f.);²⁵ (ii) In a manner similar to Greek drama²⁶ the importance of

²⁴ Cf. Owen 1970: 128: “Seneca [...] has devised a formal choral ode which freezes her (sc. Hecuba) in the attitude of abject bereavement and total obliviousness to present and future. He leaves her as a touching symbol of the social and moral condition of the remnant inhabitants of Troy, totally helpless [...] and consequently irremediably submerged in the past. Thus it is essential to an appreciation of the structure of the play to recognize that Hecuba is primarily an emblem for one of two groups—Greeks and Trojans—polarized in temporal attitudes as well as in ability to act.” Despite his recognizing the emblematic character of the first scene, Owen adheres to relations of real time.

²⁵ Cf. Owen 1968: 294–297; Sutton 1986: 26; Schwindt 1994: 41, 111.

²⁶ For the evidence in Greek tragedy, see Schwindt 1994: 188–195.

“today” is underscored in some passages (cf. Cassandra in *Ag.* 752b–754a [*hodie*] and Clytemestra toward Cassandra [971a: *hodie*]; cf. also *Ag.* 908 f.,²⁷ *Thy.* 120 f.).²⁸

With regard to the first observation, however, Owen (1968: 295–297) noted that, according to the information given in the plays, the dramatic actions will not necessarily take place within a twenty-four-hour period, and, even more to the point, he argued that daybreak at the beginning of Senecan dramas is not temporal information but a notion that steeps the entrances of demonic beings in an ominous atmosphere.²⁹ As to the second observation, the phrases do not mean a “real” (or natural) day’s span as the temporal frame of the action. They underline the unity of action that is primarily founded on its theme (Schwindt 1994: 43); they point to the goal of the action, ominously, at the beginning (e.g., in the words of the Fury in *Thy.*), or directly, as in Cassandra’s prophecy in *Agamemnon*.

In sum, the preceding outline, a condensed selection of observations and reflections, may suggest that we see Seneca as a playwright and dramaturgist of considerable innovatory power. The intense semantization of the plays’ space (stage and offstage spaces) underscores the meaning of the action and unifies it atmospherically. Seneca’s dramatic space is imbued with significance, it is symbolical and emblematic, it is palpable as atmosphere brooding tragic disaster. The dramatist is even more revolutionary in his presentation of the dramatic action. He reduces the importance of natural time and the pragmatic sequence of cause and effect (which is of course observed within individual scenes). The sequel of scenes and acts, a process enacted in natural time, is organized by the principle of pluriperspectivism and mutual mirroring. The whole of a drama is present in every act (Lefèvre 1978c: 10). The end of the action is not so much its temporal conclusion but rather the disclosure of its innermost meaning.³⁰

²⁷ Cf. Schwindt 1994: 42 f.; Sutton 1986: 27: “So the *Agamemno* would appear to be the only ancient tragedy that explicitly conforms to the Aristotelian dictum (*Poetics* 5 1449b8) that ‘regarding length, tragedy at most tends to fall within a single revolution of the sun or slightly more.’”

²⁸ Paraphrased by Owen (1968: 297) thus: “the sun itself falters at the prospect of leading day to its death.” Cf. also *Thy.* 636b–638a.

²⁹ The same holds true for the darkening of the sun in *Thy.*

³⁰ The assessment of dramatic time as presented here is convincingly demonstrated to be erroneous by Heil 2013. It should, therefore, be regarded as no more than a picture of the status causae prior to Heil’s monograph.

VISION, SOUND, AND SILENCE IN THE “DRAMA OF THE WORD”

Andreas Heil

In a famous essay T.S. Eliot claimed there is a categorical difference between tragedies, which are intended for performance, and the plays of Seneca, which he characterized as “unacted drama”: “The spoken play, the words which we read, are symbols, a shorthand, and often, as in the best of Shakespeare, a very abbreviated shorthand indeed, for the acted and felt play, which is always the real thing. [...] In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it.”¹ The approach of O. Regenbogen has proved to be equally influential; he attempted to define the *tragoediae rhetoricae*² of Seneca as “portraits of passion”: “The important thing for the author is not a well-rounded psychological process in accordance with causal rules for progression; important is his wish to make us experience outbreaks of passion in moments of crisis, and to this end he employs language which has been carefully chiselled to the very last *kolon* and brilliant images.”³

Both these interpretations have one thing in common: they reduce the tragedies of Seneca to their linguistic-literary components and thus deny them a fundamental characteristic of dramatic texts: “Dramatic texts

¹ Eliot 1934b (1956): 6f. The thesis that Seneca’s tragedies are meant not for performance but for oral delivery is most vigorously defended by Zwierlein 1966 and Kugelmeier 2007. The question, formulated in such an extreme way, is falsely put. Interpreters should rather bear in mind that tragedies in the first century AD could be encountered in different manners and spaces of communication. A good overview is to be found inter al. in Fitch 2000, Littlewood 2004: 2–4, Boyle 2008: xxxii–xxxix (summary of Boyle 2006): reception via performance in public theaters or private houses, via recitation in lecture halls or private houses, via partial recitation or performance, and via private reading.

² The formulation goes back to Leo 1878 (1963): I 148. Cf. *ibid.* 158: “istae vero non sunt tragoediae sed declamationes ad tragoediae amussim compositae et in actus deductae; in quibus si quid venuste vel acute *dictum*, floride et figurate *descriptum*, copiose *narratum* esset, plaudebant auditores, arti satisfactum erat” (my italics).

³ Regenbogen 1927–1928 (1961): 435: “Nicht auf einen nach kausalen Gesetzen des Übergangs in sich geschlossenen psychologischen Ablauf kommt es dem Dichter an, sondern Affektentladungen in Krisenmomenten mit allen Mitteln einer differenzierten und bis ins letzte Kolon durchgeformten Sprache durch glänzende Bilder anschaulich zu machen.” Regenbogen’s interpretative approach is summarized by Liebermann (2004: 1–6).

have the potential to activate all channels of the human senses.”⁴ In any performance—whether it actually takes place or is only imagined by the recipient—we are not confronted with language communication alone⁵ but usually also with “visual” and “non-verbal” acoustic codes. This type of reduction to linguistic-literary components can often be found in more recent interpretations that emphasize—with justification—that the influence of the non-dramatic Latin tradition on the dramatist Seneca was greater than, say, the influence of classical Greek theater. It may well be that in the case of Seneca’s tragedies exaggerated concentration on the genre “drama” may hinder a broader understanding.⁶ On the other hand a purely literary approach brings with it the danger of falling into the opposite extreme: “the very identification of Seneca’s tragedies as plays is now often claimed as a liability in the progress of their study.”⁷

The purpose of the following remarks is to take a significant example—the conclusion of the second act of Seneca’s *Hercules furens*⁸—and demonstrate that the failure to give due importance to the non-verbal acoustic and visual elements in the tragedies must necessarily lead to errors in interpretation. Seneca and his characters have at their disposal effective means of expression, which go beyond the “verbal *coup de théâtre*” (Eliot 1934b [1956]: 14).

ADVENTUS DEI?

During Hercules’s absence in the underworld Lycus seizes power in Thebes and kills the king, Creon. In order to legitimize his authority the tyrant wishes

⁴ Cf. the chapter “Drama as a Multimedial Form of Presentation” in Pfister 1997: 6–11. Certainly a number of non-verbal aspects in Seneca’s tragedies have already been examined. See, for example, Braun 1981. Tarrant (1978: 246 f.) deals with the function of door noises.

⁵ In this sense Schmidt (2004a: 362) inter al. takes Seneca’s tragedies as dramatic texts seriously: “the textual intention towards stage production (i.e., the intention of the plays’ texts as theatre scripts) I consider visible in the following elements: the implicit stage directions, the asides, the indications of dumb show and stage property.” Cf. Schmidt, *supra*, pp. 531–546.

⁶ Littlewood (2004: 2) remarks: “I think that we continue to underestimate how open Senecan tragedy is to the influence of non-dramatic Latin literature and that its generic identity as drama narrows our perspective undesirably.” Cf. Goldberg, *infra*, pp. 651 f.

⁷ Goldberg, *infra*, p. 652. Goldberg concludes with the following words (ibid.): “Whether students of drama and students of poetry are on their way to reconciliation at some higher level of understanding or only to a deeper level of conflict remains to be seen, but this remains for the moment the Latinists’ internal debate. The Greek elements (and the dramatic elements) that inform Seneca’s achievement will surely be called to re-enter the discussion at some point, but the cue for their return has yet to be given.”

⁸ On *Hercules furens* cf. Billerbeck, *supra*, pp. 425–433. The following remarks are adapted from Heil 2007 and 2013: 92–110.

to marry Creon's daughter, Megara, Hercules's wife. After spending some time in vain trying to persuade her to marry him⁹ he resolves to kill her and her children. Hercules's family—Amphitryon, Megara, and the children—have fled to an altar (356, cf. 503). Lycus orders his attendants to fetch wood and set fire to the altar (506–508):

congerite silvas: templa supplicibus suis
iniecta flagrent, coniugem et totum gregem
consumat unus igne subiecto rogas.¹⁰

Amphitryon, Megara's father-in-law, begs Lycus to be allowed to die "first" (*primus*: 510), but Lycus refuses: the old man is not to die. On the contrary he is ordered to view with his own eyes the deaths of his daughter-in-law and grandchildren and live on (511–513). Lycus leaves the stage. His final words were no longer addressed to Amphitryon but to his servants and soldiers (514 f.): *ego, dum cremandis trabibus accrescit rogas, / sacro regentem maria votivo colam* ("While the pyre grows with logs for burning, I shall worship the ruler of the seas with a vowed sacrifice"). Amphitryon, who has probably left the altar in order to make his request, now calls upon Jupiter, the father of the gods (516–519). When he realizes that his prayer is unheard he turns in desperation to his "son" (*gnate*), whom he addresses as a god and to whom he attributes divine qualities (520–523):

ubicumque es, audi, gnate.—cur subito labant
agitata motu templa? cur mugit solum?
infernus imo sonuit e fundo fragor.
audimur! est est sonitus Herculei gradus.¹¹

This passage has been criticized mainly for two reasons: (1) Amphitryon is witness to a subterranean earth tremor. He concludes from this that Hercules has heard his prayer and is hastening from the underworld to his aid. This naturally implies that the hero at this point has not yet left Hades. However, in

⁹ Cf. the famous scene in Shakespeare's "Richard III." Richard, of course, in contrast to Lycus, is successful. He persuades Lady Anne to marry him after he has killed her husband (I/2): "Was ever woman in this humor wooed? / Was ever woman in this humor won?" The first question relates—in meta-literary fashion—to the *imitatio*, the second claims to overreach the original. Cf. also Brooks 1980: esp. 728–730.

¹⁰ "Pile up timber: let the shrine collapse in flames on its own suppliants; once fired, let a single pyre consume the wife and the whole flock." The translations are taken from Fitch 2002 and 2004a.

¹¹ "Wherever you are, my son, hear me! Why is the shrine rocking and shaking with sudden movement? Why is the earth rumbling? A thunderous noise comes from the depths, from the underworld. We are heard! It is the sound of Hercules' step."

the prologue we have learned from Juno that Hercules together with Cerberus is already making his way through Argolis (*atrum per urbes ducit Argolicas canem* ["parading the black hound through Argives cities"]: 59). Furthermore, it is clear from the detailed description that Theseus later gives to Amphitryon that Hercules entered and left the underworld at Taenarum and not in the vicinity of Thebes (662 f. and 813). (2) After the second choral ode (524–591) Hercules really does appear and delivers his initial monologue (592–615).¹² Although Amphitryon had already announced Hercules's coming before this choral ode he is now (surprisingly) surprised to see him (618–625):

utrumne visus vota decipiunt meos,
an ille domitor orbis et Graium decus
tristi silentem nubilo liquit domum?
estne ille natus?¹³

It would be understandable if Amphitryon's present uncertainty, now that Hercules has appeared, were related solely to the question of whether his son has returned from the underworld alive or as a ghost, for—with regard to the fact that it can only be Hercules whose return is marked by those unusual phenomena—Amphitryon has had no doubts about this (according to the traditional interpretation) since the end of the second act (*est est sonitus Herculei gradus*: 523).

These apparent contradictions can be resolved if one gives Amphitryon's words their due place in the development of the second act as a whole and interprets them within the context of the stage action. In reconstructing the latter one must give due attention to the non-verbal codes. But first we must stress that in addition to those already mentioned there is a still more serious contradiction here. In the underworld Hercules can only *give ear* to the *prayer* of Amphitryon if he has in fact already become that which Juno fears—a god.¹⁴ However, the climax of the play rests precisely on the fact

¹² Friedrich (1933: 49 f.) and Zwierlein (1966: 54) have claimed that the prayer to the sun god with which Hercules opens his initial monologue implies that he has just returned from the underworld. To this Billerbeck (1999: 405 f.) has rightly objected that the sully of the upper world by the hellhound is actually continuing. The presence of Cerberus in Thebes is nowhere assumed in *Hercules furens*. Hercules has evidently delivered Cerberus to Eurystheus in Argos/Mycenae before coming to visit his family in Thebes.

¹³ "Is hope deceiving my sight, or has that world conqueror, the pride of Greece, left the halls hushed by cheerless gloom? Is that my son?"

¹⁴ Cf. Friedrich 1933: 59: "Dieses bewußte Widersachertum des Hercules gegen Juno würde als ein lächerliches Mißverhältnis wirken, wenn Seneca ihn nicht zu einem einigermaßen ebenbürtigen Gegner, d.h. geradezu zum Gott erhoben hätte. [...] Am sinnfälligsten wird diese Vergöttlichung dadurch, daß er ein Gebet in der Ferne hört und unverzüglich aus der

that Hercules, in spite of his superhuman strength, is after all still a human being. The final scene, in which Amphytrion attempts to restrain his foster son from committing suicide after the latter has realized that he himself is the murderer of his family, would be absurd if the divinity of the hero were already a known fact. It is true that in the prologue Juno claimed that here on earth Hercules is already considered as a god everywhere (39f.). This, however, is itself an exaggeration and has been shown to be such by the first choral ode and by the second act. The chorus is very far from believing in the divinity of Hercules and so is Lycus, who even casts doubt on the paternity of Jupiter (446f.). Amphytrion expresses a tentative hope for the future (265–267): *haec* [scil. *ferax deorum terra* = *Thebae*] *quae caelites / recepit et quae fecit et—fas sit loqui—/ fortasse faciet* [...] ("this land which had received gods and created gods, and—to speak no irreverence—perhaps will create them [...]"). He firmly believes in the timely return of Hercules. The particularly drastic formulation at the end of his speech is probably to be understood as a concealed threat to the chorus who are refusing their aid: *aderit et poenas petet / subitusque ad astra emerget* ("He will be with us, seeking vengeance, and suddenly emerge to the sight of the stars": 275f.). A quasi-divine potency is attributed to Hercules only by Megara in her brief outbreak of euphoria (279–295), but this is immediately shown to be the result of a deep despondency (cf. 295f.). Help is only to be expected from her husband and not from any god (*nec ullus eriget fractos deus* ["no god will rebuild our broken lives": 308]). But Hercules is buried in the underworld: *demersus ac defossus et toto insuper / oppressus orbe quam viam ad superos habet?* ("Submerged, buried, weighed down by the whole earth above him, what path does he have to the upper world?": 317f.). She rejects her father-in-law's comforting words (311f., 313f.): *quod nimis miseri volunt, / hoc facile credunt* ("What the wretched deeply desire, they easily believe").

These words receive confirmation in the most impressive manner at the end of Act Two. Amphytrion, who sees himself forced to be an onlooker at his own family's agonising death, now genuinely imagines in his extreme desperation that he *sees and hears what he would dearly like to believe*: that his son is suddenly rising up from the underworld as a divine rescuer. The beginning and the end of the second act are closely related through

Unterwelt hervorbricht, um Hilfe zu bringen, wie es dem ἀλεξίκακος geziemt (520 ff.), während bei Euripides seine rechtzeitige Heimkehr einem glücklichen Zufall zu verdanken ist." The divinity is given even greater emphasis in Friedrich 1967b (1972): 142–145. So also Zintzen 1972: 179 and Papadopoulou 2004: 275.

ring composition.¹⁵ In his speech at the beginning of the act Amphitryon first invoked Jupiter (205 f.). Only after Jupiter (and the chorus)¹⁶ failed to intervene did he address his foster son in the second person—a brief request that is, significantly, not a prayer: *adsis sospes et remees tuis* [A *precor* E] / *tandemque venias victor ad victam domum* (“Be with us, return in safety to your family [A; “I pray”: E], and come at last in victory to your vanquished home”: 277 f.).¹⁷ This is now repeated in compressed and intensified form: first the recourse to Jupiter (516–519), then the absence of any reaction (*quid deos frustra precor?* [“Why make vain prayers to the gods?”]: 519). The short prayer to his son (*ubicumque es, audi, gnate* [“Wherever you are, my son, hear me!”]: 520) appears now to be followed promptly by a quaking and groaning of the earth, typical signs for the epiphany of a god.¹⁸ The word “*audimur*” (“We are heard!”: 523)¹⁹ is a far cry from the tentative *fortasse faciet* (“perhaps will create”: 267), which placed the apotheosis of Hercules in an indefinite future. When Amphitryon—more optimistic at first—reaches the same degree of desperation as Megara, he shares her desperate hope; more than this, he believes he is going to be a witness to the realization of this hope. Then disappointment comes—more cruel, more direct than in the case of Megara, and this time there is no *magna sed nimium loquor* (“but I speak too boldly”: 295) to be heard from Amphitryon. In the third act, with renewed intensification, these disappointed hopes will finally be fulfilled. This two-stage progression of emotion, starting from optimism and leading to desperation and finally to fulfillment, is a good example of what Steidle (1944: 257) sees as a characteristic of Seneca’s, namely the “Crescendoprinzip,” “das mit allen Mitteln der Nuancierung, Steigerung und des Umbruches in Pathos und Aktion Effekt auf Effekt türmt, ohne dazwischen einmal eine Entspannung eintreten zu lassen.”

¹⁵ For more detail, cf. Eisgrub 2002: 51.

¹⁶ For full discussion of the passive role of the chorus, cf. Heil 2013: 82–88.

¹⁷ Zwierlein (1976 [2004]: I 181 and 1986b: 29) defends the variant *tuis* given in A against the *precor* of the Etruscus, which is preferred by Fitch 2002 and others: “[...] so schließt Amphitryon seinen Monolog, der sich gerade dadurch von dem anschließend durch Megara gesprochenen unterscheidet, daß er den Gebetsstil möglichst vermeidet.”

¹⁸ Cf. Fitch 1987a: 251 (on 520–522): “[...] the phenomena suggest the imminent epiphany of a *numen*, a suggestion quite in keeping with the implication of 519 f. The wording of 520 f. strengthens this suggestion, as the shaking of a temple would normally be caused by the advent of a god [...]”. See also Schmitz 1993: 179 f. and Billerbeck 1999: 378 (on 521).

¹⁹ Fitch 1987a: 252 (on 523) points to Sen. *Oed.* 571 (*audior*). So also Billerbeck 1999: 378 (on 523): “formelhaft, um die Gebetserhörung anzuzeigen.”

AMPHITRYON'S ILLUSION

Hercules does not break through the earth in a superhuman fashion; on the contrary, he reaches Thebes a little later by the route described by Juno. All the aforementioned difficulties and incongruities disappear if one assumes that Amphitryon only *believes* that he is witness of an epiphany. To put it more precisely: he really does hear something (as will be shown in the following), but he misinterprets what he hears. In psychological terms: Amphitryon is a victim of illusion. In contrast to hallucination (imaginary perception having no corresponding stimulation of the senses), illusion involves the wrong interpretation or reorganization of sense perceptions, which have a correspondence or a point of contact with reality.²⁰

Critics have failed to recognize that at the end of the second act Amphitryon is a victim of illusion. The reason is that neither he himself nor anyone else points it out *expressis verbis*. That it can only be a question of illusion becomes clear if one takes the stage action into account. Amphitryon's announcement (*est est sonitus Herculei gradus* ["It is the sound of Hercules' step"]: 523) produces no effect whatever—just like the words of Andromache who, threatened by Odysseus, believes that her dead husband is appearing as her rescuer: *arma concussit manu, / iaculatur ignes* ("He brandished his weapons in his hands, he is hurling firebrands": *Tro.* 683 f.). At the beginning of the third act the situation remains unchanged. Amphitryon, Megara, and the children evidently have not changed their positions. It is expressly emphasized that the soldiers whom Lycus left behind are still present (616 f.): *sed templa quare miles infestus tenet / limenque sacrum terror armorum obsidet?* ("But why are there hostile soldiers in control of the shrine, and threatening weapons around the sacred entrance?"). Unmoved, they guard the shrine that before the choral ode Amphitryon saw swaying (520): *subito labant / agitata motu templa* ("the shrine rocking and shaking with sudden

²⁰ Cf. inter al. Peters 1990: 217–219. In his tragedies Seneca repeatedly described phenomena of this sort with great precision. Trabert (1953: 28–30) considers *Tro.* 683 ff., *Phoen.* 39 ff., *Med.* 958 ff., *Herc. O.* 1002–1024 and comes to the following conclusion (ibid. 29): "Sämtliche Halluzinationen stehen am Höhepunkt einer Affektentwicklung. In der Verzweiflung bricht die Umnachtung herein." Cf. Braginton 1933: 88: "Only the visions of Hercules (*H.F.*) and of Cassandra are produced by divine inspiration, and only these two characters are considered mad. The others, Andromache, Medea, Deianira, Oedipus (*Phoe.*), Hercules (*H.O.*), are in despair or physical suffering bordering on madness." Thyestes becomes a victim of optical and acoustic hallucination at the moment he is unwittingly about to drink the blood of his own children (Sen. *Thy.* 985 ff.). For a full discussion, cf. Heil 2013: 41–55.

movement").²¹ In addition, the chorus makes its appearance first and not, as one might expect after Amphitryon's announcement, Hercules himself. If the "steps" are already audible, then the arrival must be imminent. This is what happens in the imitation in *Hercules Oetaeus*. The chorus hears a "noise" (*fragor, sonus*),²² and in the next line Hercules arrives (1128–1130): *sed quis non modicus fragor / aures attonitas movet? / est est Herculeus sonus* ("But what intemperate clamour / strikes and astounds our ears? / The sound of Hercules!").

As a matter of fact Amphitryon has to wait more than 90 lines before he really sees his son. The fact that nobody reacts to what Amphitryon thinks he hears and sees does not mean that his sense perceptions have no correspondence to some element of stage reality. Over and above the information that the audience receives through the language communication of the figures, a central role is given to "non-verbal information"²³ at the end of the second act. It is also of significance for the disposition of the play as a whole that precisely at this point—after the *agon* between Lycus, Megara, and Amphitryon and before Theseus's epic description of the underworld—non-verbal acoustic and visual elements are placed so conspicuously in the foreground.

By means of three stages of disappointment Amphitryon is brought to the point at which he breaks down completely without uttering a word. Lycus refuses him the favor of being allowed to die; Jupiter does not react. At this moment he turns to Hercules. His prayer seems to be heard without a moment's delay: He believes he sees the temple swaying (520 f.) and thinks

²¹ The presence of the soldiers is therefore of decisive importance for the dramaturgy. Billerbeck's criticism (1999: 412 on 616 f.) is thus rendered null and void: "Der Beschreibung des Hercules entnehmen wir zudem, dass Soldaten vor dem Heiligtum [...] postiert sind, um die Schutzsuchenden zu bewachen. Dieses Detail dürfte der euripideischen Vorlage (*Herc.* 527) entlehnt sein, bleibt aber bei Seneca für die Handlung folgenlos." One may assume, even without a reference in the text, that these soldiers flee the stage the moment they see Hercules and Theseus.

²² On the question of whether the noise of the steps or—more probably—Hercules's voice is meant, cf. Avena 2002: 209 (on 1130). Fitch 2004a adds the stage direction: "He [scil. Hercules] is carried in on a litter by servants." Cf. the lines in which the chorus announces the entrance of Philoctetes (*Herc. O.* 1595–1606).

²³ Cf. Pfister 1997: 44–49. The non-verbal information that has to be reconstructed from the "implicit performance directions" (cf. Schmidt, *supra*, pp. 532–535) allows the viewers in this case to make a correct assessment of the figure-specific verbal information ("complementarity" of the information transmission, Pfister 1997: 75–77). Cf. Pfister 1997: 61: "The juxtaposition of a-perspectively transmitted information and information transmitted via a figure-perspective enables the receiver to recognise an utterance as perspectively distorted if it deviates from the non-verbal information [...]."

he hears the groaning of the earth (*mugit solum*: 521) and a subterranean crashing (*infernus [...]* *fragor*: 522). At the same time we have been informed in detail by means of "implicit performance directions"²⁴ about what is really happening on stage while Amphytrion experiences his supposed epiphany. In line 506 Lycus had given the order to fetch "firewood" (*silvas*). This wood was to be brought out from the temple near the altar where Hercules's family had taken refuge (*templa supplicibus suis / iniecta flagrent*: 506 f.).²⁵ After his departure the work on this pyre has clearly already begun. (514 f.): *ego, dum cremandis trabibus accrescit rogos, / sacro regentem maria votivo colam* ("While the pyre grows with logs for burning, I shall worship the ruler of the seas with a vowed sacrifice").²⁶ With the help of this information one can reconstruct the manner in which Seneca imagined the close of the second act: Amphytrion leaves the altar in order to address his request to Lycus. On the latter's departure he remains alone. The servants or soldiers continue the work of dismantling the heavy beams (cf. *trabibus*: 514) in the temple and dragging them to the altar. The demolition work in the temple causes

²⁴ Lycus's words at line 506 f. contain a prospective figure direction (order to the servants or soldiers). His remark at 514 f. contains a simultaneous and, at the same time, prospective performance (figure and stage) direction (the work on the pyre is continued by the servants or soldiers) and also a prospective figure direction (announcement of his own departure). When Hercules at line 616 f. notices that the soldiers are continuing to occupy the temple this should be taken as a simultaneous and retrospective figure direction, which underscores that Lycus's orders continue to be obeyed (cf. note 21 *supra*).

²⁵ The "temples" (i.e., the combustible parts of the temple) should be "cast upon" (i.e., stacked up around) their "seekers after protection" (i.e., those who in their need for protection have fled to the altar, which belongs to the temple). The expression *templa* here should be taken as a metonymy, *totum pro partibus*. Perhaps Seneca is playing on the meaning "transverse beam" (Paul. Fest. p. 505 L.): *templum significat [...] et tignum quod in aedificio transversum ponitur*; cf. OLD s.v. *templum* 5. On *inicere* cf. ThLL VII.1, 1611,65 (Pfligersdorffer): "iaciendo immittere, imponere [...] etiam c. colore adiciendi, circumciciendi [...]". Since temple and altar should be thought of as being separate from one another, as Billerbeck (1999: 374 [on 506 f.]) rightly remarks, the idea that the temple should collapse upon the "seekers after protection" at the altar is problematical. Billerbeck (1999: 127), however, takes it this way: "der Tempel soll über seinen Schutzbefohlenen brennend zusammenstürzen." So also Fitch 2002: "let the shrine collapse in flames on its own suppliants."

²⁶ Since Hercules on his return does not mention the pyre in so many words and in the fifth act "assumes that a pyre for his self-immolation must first be constructed (1216)," Eisgrub (2004: 102 f.) believes that Lycus's order at the end of the second act is not carried out immediately. So also Kugelmeier 2007: 64 and 187 (without reference to Eisgrub). This argument does not seem to me particularly convincing. Hercules wishes to construct his pyre exclusively out of his own weapons, not because there is no other combustible material on stage but because these weapons, which he assigns to his dead sons individually (cf. Heil 2000, Eisgrub 2002: 98 n. 273), have become in his eyes "guilty" and therefore deserve destruction.

tremors and noise and these appear to Amphitryon to be the signs of the epiphany.²⁷ He believes he hears the “step of Hercules” (523): what he really hears is the gradual growth of the pyre (*accrescit rogos*: 514).

WHY ART THOU STILL?

Since there is no reaction to his announcement—Hercules does not appear, the soldiers pay no attention to his words—Amphitryon must eventually understand like Andromache (*cernitis, Danai, Hectorem?* / *an sola video* [“Can you perceive Hector, you Danaans? Or do I see him alone?”]: 684 f.) that he has deceived himself.²⁸ Amphitryon recognizes his self-deception at the end of the act—and falls silent. His final and complete collapse is no longer expressed in words. “There are many modes of remaining silent [...]. Thus Niobe remained silent in face of her excessive woe.”²⁹ Seneca himself made repeated use of “eloquent silence” (*silentium clamosum*: Cassiod. *var.* 4.51.8) as a means of intensifying expression.³⁰ As a general rule the breakdown in language communication is commented upon by other figures or by the silent figure itself.³¹ We see this when the nurse describes how Phaedra, who

²⁷ One cannot say with certainty whether the temple (or parts of it) really do begin to sway as a result of the demolition work or whether Amphitryon's illusion here turns into a hallucination. The second variant would be easier to realize in a production.

²⁸ Incidentally, Andromache's hallucination begins as an acoustic illusion. The noise that she hears does not stem from Hector, as she mistakenly thinks, but from the soldiers who, on Odysseus's orders, are destroying Hector's tomb (667 f. and 679 f.).

²⁹ Schol. on Aeschyl. *Prom.* 437: Ἡ σιγὴ ἔχει μεθόδους πολλὰς ... ὥς ἡ Νιόβη διὰ τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν λύπην ἐσίγα. It is well-known that as early as Aristophanes (*Ran.* 911–926) Aeschylus was mocked on account of his silent figures (in particular Niobe and Achilles). On keeping silent in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, cf. esp. the detailed treatment in Taplin 1972. Taplin distinguishes (1) “insignificant silences,” (2) “significant silences,” and (3) silences “significant only in their ending” (esp. p. 94). Dumb shows, i.e., scenes in which the important thing is not so much the speeches and replies of the figures (“Repliken der Figuren”), but the visual and/or acoustic impression, were also employed in the New Comedy. Thus Menander's *Aspis* begins with a silent, mysterious procession. Cf. Arnott 2001. Furthermore, we know of at least one performance of Euripides's *Orestes*, which began with a procession of Helena and the Trojan booty, although the text gives no indication of this. Cf. Zwierlein 1970 (2004): II 72 and reference to Schol. *Or.* 57: οὐκ ὁρθῶς νῦν ποιοῦσιν τινες τῶν ὑποκριτῶν πρῶ εἰσπορευομένην τὴν Ἑλένην καὶ τὰ λάφυρα.

³⁰ In the article “Silence in Seneca's Tragedies,” Wesołowska (1990–1992) deals with silent figures as a theatrical convention (*personae mutae*) and with situations in which communication breaks down.

³¹ Taplin (1972: 97) formulates this as a rule but immediately goes on to quote an exception. Cassandra's silence in *Agamemnon* is not commented upon at first in so many words (*ibid.* p. 77): “In the theatre the audience could not help noticing this woman in her unusual costume,

is in love, walks on stage in silence and then faints (583–586). When she wakes up in the arms of Hippolytus,³² she wants to confess her love to her stepson. In an address to her *animus* she works up her courage (592–599), then asks Hippolytus to have all witnesses removed. Nevertheless, she is still incapable of speaking at first (601–607):

HI. en locus ab omni liber arbitrio vacat.

PH. sed ora coeptis transitum verbis negant;
vis magna vocem mittit et maior tenet.
vos testor omnis, caelites, hoc quod volo
me nolle.

HI. animusne cupiens aliquid effari nequit?

PH. curae leves locuntur, ingentes stupent.

HI. See, the place is clear and free of any observation.

PH. Yet my lips refuse passage to the words I begin. A great force impels my speech, a greater restrains it. I call all you gods to witness that this thing I want—I do not want.

HI. Your spirit desires to utter something but cannot?

PH. Light cares can speak, huge cares are dumfounded.

At this point the interruption in communication is not only commented upon by the characters, it is also marked in the text substratum by the incomplete line 605: "Die restlichen zwei Drittel des Verses, bevor Hippolytus wieder das Wort ergreift [...], sind Pause im Sinn der Wortlosigkeit, des Nicht-weiter-sprechen-könnens, des Ringens, können aber auch in stummem Spiel ausgefüllt werden."³³ At the end of the act Hippolytus threatens to kill his stepmother. Yet Phaedra, in her hopelessness, longs for exactly this death at the hands of her beloved. Hippolytus, however, refuses (710–712):

particularly as she alone is in the chariot with Agamemnon. Aeschylus must have meant them to notice her: he himself has broken the 'rules'. [...] It seems that Aeschylus means us (the audience) to notice her, and yet not to centre our attention on her; to have a vague curiosity about her, and yet not to ask specific questions. This is unusual technique for Greek tragedy."

³² The visual element is of great importance here. Cf. Schmidt 2001: 356: "Die eigentliche Zentralszene des Stücks [...] beginnt mit der erotisch besetzten Konstellation der Phaedra in den Armen des Hippolytus, mit der größten szenisch möglichen Nähe und körperlicher Intimität: ein scheinbares Liebespaar als Raumpunkt, als Focus des Bühnenraums—und dies in unmittelbarer Nachbarschaft der Dianastatue [...]. Ein Knotenpunkt ist diese Konstellation auch in der Entwicklung der Handlung, indem diese äußerste Nähe zu einem Zeitpunkt erreicht wird, da Hippolytus seinen Frauenhass in extreme Irrationalität getrieben hat [...]."

³³ Cf. Schmidt 2004a: 337. On attempts in baroque tragedy to mark silences typographically, cf. Benthien 2006: 295–298.

Hippolyte, nunc me compotem voti facis;
 sanas furentem. maius hoc voto meo est,
 salvo ut pudore manibus immoriar tuis.³⁴

After her desire for love and death have been rejected, Phaedra falls silent like Amphitryon and, if we may trust the words of the nurse at this point (*hanc maestam prius / recreate* ["first comfort her in her distress"]: 730 f.³⁵), loses consciousness for a moment.³⁶

Another example is to be found in *Hercules furens* itself. The falling silent of Amphitryon at the end of Act Two prefigures his physical breakdown at the end of Act Five. Here, too, the accompanying stage action must be deduced from the context (1300 f.):

AM. ecce iam facies scelus
 volens sciensque.

HE. pande, quid fieri iubes?

AM. See, now you will commit a crime intentionally and knowingly.

HE. Tell me, what would you have me do?

As Fitch in particular has shown (1987a: 450 [on 1300–1313] and 2004b: 32), Hercules's sudden compliance is caused by the very real possibility that his human foster father might die, overwhelmed by all his suffering. With the words *ecce quam miserum metu / cor palpitat pectusque sollicitum ferit* ("See how my poor heart pounds with fear and beats against my anxious breast": 1298 f.) Amphitryon sinks down in exhaustion because his foster son will not be deflected from his resolve to commit suicide.³⁷ The change of mind at

³⁴ "Hippolytus, now you grant me fulfilment of my prayer, you heal my madness. To die at your hands with my honour safe—this is better than my prayer."

³⁵ This is a retrospective figure direction (with relation to Phaedra) and, at the same time, a prospective figure direction (with relation to the servants).

³⁶ The nurse was evidently present as a silent figure in the background of the stage. The wordless, ominous presence of figures on stage—the most famous example in surviving Greek tragedy is Cassandra in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (cf. note 31 *supra*)—was also used by Seneca to great effect. In the second act of *Troas* (*Troades*) the seer Calchas, whose decision will seal the fates of Polyxena and Astyanax, is probably on stage from the beginning of the second scene on. Cf. Heil 2013: 142–152.

³⁷ Cf. the retrospective (with relation to Amphitryon) and prospective (with relation to Theseus) figure direction in line 1317 f.: *artus alleua afflictos solo, / Theseu, parentis* ("Theseus, raise up my father's body, collapsed on the ground"). Eisgrub (2004: 105 f.) supposes, however, that Amphitryon threatens suicide already in line 1300 f. and thereafter at 1312 f. The greater effect of non-verbal communication is also demonstrated in *Phoenissae*. Here Antigone prevents the suicide of her father Oedipus by means of the suppliant's gesture, which he describes (*nata, quid genibus meis / fles advoluta?* ["Daughter, why do you throw yourself weeping at my knees?"]: *Phoen.* 306 f.), after her arguments have not had the desired effects.

this point can only be understood if one goes beyond the verbal information transmitted by the figures and uses the implicit performance directions, which are also present in the text, to bring out the visual component intended by the author. It is clear from these examples that Regenbogen's dictum must be revised (1927–1928 [1961]: 434): "Die Kunst, Personen auch schweigen, verstummen zu lassen, kennt diese späte Tragödie nicht mehr."

CONCLUSION

The contradictions mentioned at the start are resolved if we accept the suggested interpretation: (1) Hercules does not break through the earth after the prayer of his foster father. On the contrary, he appears after the choral ode just as Juno predicted he would and knows nothing whatever about the happenings in Thebes and his family's danger. In his moment of need Amphitryon expects from his son more than even Hercules can achieve. To him Hercules already appears as the one whom Juno fears, the future god. (2) The second act ends not, as commentators have generally assumed, in a spirit of optimism but in extreme desperation. We must be aware of this somber background at the beginning of Act Three if we are to appreciate the full dramatic force of the words (often criticized as mere rhetorical *amplificatio*³⁸) that the doubting father addresses to that son who has finally returned home in spite of everything (618–624):

utrumne visus vota decipiunt meos,
an ille domitor orbis et Graium decus
tristi silentem nubilo liquit domum?
estne ille natus? membra laetitia stupent.
o nate, certa at sera Thebarum salus,
teneone in auras editum an vana fruor
deceptus umbra? tune es?³⁹

The process of self-reassurance is so drawn out because it is immediately preceded by bitter disappointment. Since his ears and eyes have deceived him, Amphitryon cannot forgo haptic confirmation. Through direct physical contact (*teneone*: 623) the foster father must make sure that it is not an

³⁸ Cf. inter al. Billerbeck 1999: 412 f. (on 618–625).

³⁹ "Is hope deceiving my sight, or has that world conqueror, the pride of Greece, left the halls hushed by cheerless gloom? Is that my son? My body is stunned with joy. My son, sure though tardy saviour of Thebes, am I holding someone risen to the open air, or enjoying a false and empty apparition? Is it you?"

incorporeal shadow (*vana* [...] *umbra*: 623 f.), but his son in genuine physical form that he has before him. It is noticeable that Amphitryon in line 618 expresses as a fear what we now know really did happen at the end of the second act: his wish (*vota*) deceived him (*decipiunt*, cf. *deceptus*: 625). With a very slight alteration to the text the interpretation suggested here could be given additional support. Did Seneca perhaps write:

*iterumne*⁴⁰ visus vota decipiunt meos [...]?
Is hope deceiving my sight *again* [...]?

Amphitryon could ask this because his illusion, though mainly acoustic, also included visual phenomena (520 f.). The little word *iterum*, upon which the main question rests, would confirm very convincingly the result of this study. In the interpretation of Seneca's tragedies both the acoustic and the visual component have to be taken into consideration. His plays are not only linguistic-literary but also multimedia works of art, designed for real or imagined performance.

⁴⁰ Seneca employs the word *iterum* three times at the beginning of a trimeter: *Oed.* 333, *Phaedr.* 371 and 703. The error would be explained by the fact that the combination *utrum* (or *utrumne*) [...] *an* occurs far more frequently than *iterumne*, which is found only in Lucan (8.584 and 9.222) and Claudian (*Epithalamium dictum Honorio Augusto et Mariae* = *Carm. maiora* 10.112). In Seneca's tragedies *utrumne* occurs in a direct alternative question a further five times: *Oed.* 309 and 1036, *Ag.* 579, *Thy.* 1032, and *Herc. O.* 1254. Cf. Billerbeck 1999: 413 (on 618 f.).

THE CHORUS: SENECA AS LYRIC POET

Giancarlo Mazzoli

1. METER AND THEMES

The single choral songs in Seneca's corpus of tragedies, excluding *Phoen.*, which lacks choruses, but including *Herc. O.* and *Octavia*, whose authenticity is partially or completely denied, will be discussed in this chapter (cf. Mazzoli 1996) with regard to their metric (*iuxta* Zwierlein 1986a: 464–466) and thematic paradigm as well as to the identity of the choral characters. The meters and characters of the monodies, found throughout the corpus, except in *Herc. f.* and *Phoen.*, will also be discussed.

To the polymetric choruses I apply Dangel's (2001: 248–269) distinction between polyphony, produced by sequences of “stanzas” with different meters (*cantica mutatis modis* = *CMM*), and, within this, polymetry in the strict sense (*cola libera* = *CL*) as found in parts of *Oed.* II, III and *Ag.* III, and throughout *Ag.* IV (analyzed in Zwierlein 1986a: 467–469).

A thematic framework will outline the succession (or interplay) of the three elements of the lyric choral tradition: *kairós* (= K), *mythos* (= M), and *gnome* (= G). Naturally, in the *fabulae cothurnatae* (i.e., all the tragedies except for *Octavia*), M is a second-level myth while K, the connection with reality, is the first-level myth and has a more-or-less direct relationship to the dramatic context. Thematic observations refer to the essential framework of the choruses and exclude both K, where it is simply a device of connection with the surrounding action, and the more incidental digressions of M and G.

1.1. Choral Songs

Hercules furens: *Theban Citizens*

I, vv. 125–203, anap.: K (“*mattinata*”: 125–158); G/K (antiheroic choice vs. Hercules's *hybris*)

II, vv. 524–591, asclep. min.: G/K (*Fortuna*, 524 f., vs. the feats of Hercules, 526–546); M (Underworld, 547–591)

III, vv. 830–894 (830–874, sapph. min.; 875–894, glyc.): M (Underworld, 830–863); G/K (*meditatio mortis*, 864–874 vs. feast for Hercules, 875–894)

IV, vv. 1054–137, anap.: K (Hercules's sleep, 1054–1065); G/K ("Sleep litanies," consequences of the *furor* and *schetliasmós*, 1066–137)

*Troades: Trojan Women Prisoners*¹

I, vv. 67–163, *kommós*, anap.: K (*schetliasmós*, 67–141 / *makarismós*, 142–163)

II, vv. 371–408, asclep. min.: G (*post mortem nihil*)

III, vv. 814–860, sapph. min.: K (prognoses of imprisonment)

IV, vv. 1009–1055, sapph. min.: G (pain alleviated by sharing, with two *exempla* of M for comparison, 1009–1041); K (farewell to Troy, 1042–1055)

Medea: Corinthian Men (and Women?)

I, vv. 56–115 (*CMM*: 56–74, asclep. min.; 75–92, glyc.; 93–109 asclep. min.; 110–115 dact. hexam.): K (*epithalamium*)

II, vv. 301–379, anap.: M/K (the Argonauts' *nefas*)

III, vv. 579–669, sapph. min.: K/G (crime and punishment)

IV, vv. 849–878, iamb. dim. cat. (cum clausulis): K (Medea's *furor*)

*Phaedra: Athenian (or Cretan?) Men (and Women?)*²

I, vv. 274–357 (*CMM*: 274–324, sapph. min.; 325–357, anap.): G (274–295: the irrational power of love); M (296–357: *exempla*)

II, vv. 736–834 (*CMM*: 736–752, sapph. min. cum adoniis; 753–760, asclep. min.; 761–763, dact. tetram. acat.; 764–782, asclep. min.; 783, glyc.; 784, pherecr.; 785–823, asclep. min.; 824–834, iamb. trim.): K/G (vanity and the dangers of beauty)

III, vv. 959–988, anap.: G (the triumph of irrationality)

IV, vv. 1123–1153 (*CMM*: 1123–1127, anap.; 1128f., asclep. min.; 1130 glyc.; 1131, pherecr.; 1132–1148, anap.; 1149–1153, sapph. min.): G (1123–1143: antiheroic choice); K (1144–1153: present example of Theseus)

Oedipus: Theban Citizens

I, vv. 110–201 (*CMM*: 110–153, sapph. min. cum adoniis; 154–201, anap.): K (the pathology of the plague)

¹ Concerning the title of the play and the identity of the chorus, I follow the traditional view: cf. Mazzoli 2010c: 351f.; for a different opinion (title: *Troas*; double chorus of Trojan women and Greek soldiers), see esp. Stroh 1994: 251 n. 23, 261 n. 69, Stroh 2008: 203, 213 n. 55.

² Cf. Fantham 2000: 18f.

- II, vv. 403–508 (*CMM*: 403 f., dact. hexam.; 405–415, *CL*; 416–428, sapph. min. cum adonio; 429–431, dact. hexam.; 432–444, anap.; 445–448, dact. hexam.; 449–466, dact. tetram. acat. cum adonio; 467–471, dact. hexam.; 472–502, *CL*; 503–508, dact. hexam.): M (Bacchus's aretalogy)
 III, vv. 709–763 (*CMM*: 709–737, *CL*; 738–763, anap.): M (ancient Theban misdeeds)
 IV, vv. 882–914, glyc.: G (882–891, antiheroic choice); M (892–910, *exemplum Icarī*)
 V, vv. 980–997, anap.: G (resignation to destiny)

Agamemnon: *Argive Women* (I, II, IV); *Trojan Women Prisoners* (III)

- I, vv. 57–107, anap.: G (antiheroic choice)
 II, vv. 310–387, anap.: M (cletic hymn)
 III, vv. 589–692, *kommós* (*CMM*: 589–636, *CL*; 637–658, 664–692, anap.): G/K (*schetliasmós*)
 IV, vv. 808–866, *CL*: M (*laudes Herculis*)

Thyestes: *Argive Citizens*

- I, vv. 122–175, asclep. min.: K/M (Argos and Tantalus)
 II, vv. 336–403, glyc.: K/G (peace between the brothers; true and false kingship; antiheroic choice)
 III, vv. 546–622, sapph. min. cum adonio: K/G (peace between the brothers; the fickleness of destiny)
 IV, vv. 789–884, anap.: K/M (the eclipse and presage of cosmic chaos)

Hercules Oetaeus: *Women Prisoners of Oechalia*: I; *Aetolian Women*: II; *the Inhabitants of Thessaly* (?): III, IV, V, VI

- I, vv. 104–232, *kommós* (104–172, asclep. min.; 225–232, anap.): G/K (*schetliasmós*)
 II, vv. 583–705, anap.: K (583–601, *schetliasmós*); G (602–639, false kingship; 640–699, antiheroic choice)
 III, vv. 1031–130, glyc.: M (1030–101, Orpheus; 1102–1127, presage of cosmic chaos)
 IV, vv. 1151–1160; 1207–1217; 1279–1289, anap.: K/G (on Hercules's *dolor* and *virtus*)
 V, vv. 1518–1606, sapph. min. cum adonio: K (grief and praise for Hercules)
 VI, vv. 1983–1996, anap.: G/K (prayer to Hercules)

Octavia: *Roman Citizens in Favor of Octavia (I, II, IV); Roman Citizens in Favor of Poppaea (III)*

- I, vv. 273–376, anap.: K (tyrannical abuses of Roman tradition and the misdeeds of Nero)
- II, vv. 669–689, anap.: K (execration of Poppaea)
- III, vv. 762–819, *kommós*, anap.: M (762–779, mythical loves; 806–819, the power of Love)
- IV, vv. 877–898, anap.: K/G (historical *exempla* and antiheroic choice)
- V, vv. 924–982, *kommós*, anap.: G/K (924–957, the power of fate and the misadventures of the Julio-Claudian women); M/K (972–982, Iphigeneia's Aulis and Octavia's Rome)

1.2. Monodies

- Troades*: vv. 83–98; 116–132; 142–155, anap. (Hecuba's lyric parts in the *kommós*); 705–735, anap. (Andromache)
- Medea*: vv. 740–751, troch. tetram. cat.; 771–786, iamb. systema epod.; 787–842, anap. (Medea)
- Phaedra*: vv. 1–84, anap. (Hippolytus); 1201–1212, troch. tetram. cat. (Theseus)
- Oedipus*: vv. 223–232, troch. tetram. cat.; 233–238, dact. hexam. (Creon)
- Agamemnon*: vv. 759–774, iamb. dim. (Cassandra)
- Thyestes*: vv. 920–969, anap. (Thyestes)
- Hercules Oetaeus*: vv. 173–224, anap. (Iole); 1863–939, anap.; 1944–1962, dact. tetram. acat. (Alcmene)
- Octavia*: vv. 1–33; 57–99, anap. (Octavia); 201–221, anap. (nurse); 646–668, anap. (Octavia); 899–923; 958–971, anap. (Octavia's lyric parts in the *kommós*)

2. TYPES OF CHORUS

The breakdown in 1.1 and 1.2 can be used to outline Senecan chorus types on the basis of four main categories: a) number; b) position; c) relationship with characters; and d) identity of the chorus members.

- a) Seneca's tragedies normally have four choral songs, well delimited and separated from the action. Typical instances are found in *Herc. f.*, *Med.*, *Phaedr.*, and *Thy.* Two dramas, *Tro.* and *Ag.*, differ from this (see c), while *Oed.* has five choral songs. Choruses in *Herc. O.* and *Octavia* are more numerous and more fragmented.

- b) The first song normally follows the prologue (*Herc. f.*, *Tro.*, *Med.*, *Ag.*, *Thy.*, and *Herc. O.*), although in *Phaedr.*, *Oed.*, and *Octavia* it is delayed until after the first scene. In *Herc. O.* and *Octavia*, the two plays whose authorship has been contested, the last song, which normally precedes the epilogue in Seneca, comes at the end as was the norm in Greek theatre, at least for the closing lines.
- c) Seneca's choruses do not usually establish a *kommós* exchange with the characters, although there are exceptions in *Tro.* I (as in Euripides's tragedy of the same name), *Ag.* III, *Herc. O.* I and IV, and the finale of *Octavia*.
- d) The chorus is a single male one in *Herc. f.*, *Oed.*, and *Thy.*, perhaps also in *Med.* and *Phaedr.*; and a single female one in *Tro.* (apparently also in *Phoen.*, judging from the title, although the play has come down to us without choruses); double male in *Octavia* and double female in *Ag.* and treble, perhaps mixed, in *Herc. O.*

The simultaneous application of all four categories identifies three tragedies (*Herc. f.*, *Med.*, and *Thy.*), as having a classical (Hor. *ars* 189f.!) five-part structure: a prologue, three episodes, and an epilogue, articulated at regular intervals by a single chorus with no *kommós* exchange with the characters. The author considers these to be the most mature of Seneca's plays.

3. FUNCTIONS OF METER

In her accurate statistics for the tragedies of which Seneca is known to be the author, Dangel (2001) cites a ratio of about 3:1 between *diverbia* and lyric parts. More precisely, *diverbia*, all in iambic trimeters, account for 72.5%; lyric parts make up 27.5%, of which a small fraction in the monodies is recitative (0.5% in trochaic tetrameters and 0.8% in epodes or iambic dimeters); and the rest, mostly in choruses, is made up as follows: anapaests, by far the most common at 13.2%; 6.5% of Horatian meters arranged in "stanzas"; a total of 6% of *CMM* and *CL*; and 0.5% of dactylic meters (hexameters and tetrameters). The same figures apply substantially to *Herc. O.*, in spite of the unusual length of this tragedy, although more space is occupied by monodies (70.8% of *diverbia* in iambic trimeters; 29.2% of lyric parts, of which 8.9% in the choruses and 6.4% in the monodies consist of anapaests; 13% of Horatian meters in the choruses; and 0.9% of dactylic tetrameters in monodies). *Octavia*, in contrast, has a decidedly larger portion (39%) of lyric parts, although all in anapaests, compared to only 61% in iambic trimeters.

In line, most likely, with stylistic preferences that were already beginning to develop in the Republican era (Martina 1996: 17–19), the choruses in Seneca's tragedies are composed of a far more limited range of meters compared to those in Greek tragedies (cf. AA.VV. 1984–1985): in addition to anapaests, there is only a small sample of Horatian monodic lyric; while cretic and bacchiac meters, although still used in Republican era tragedies, are absent. Even more evidently, his choruses lack strophic responsion (Hiltbrunner 1985: 990) and semichoruses, reflecting a more general tendency in Latin theatre to eradicate the orchestric movements of the chorus. Nevertheless, as a dramatic author, Seneca is far from the rejection of lyrics he ostentatiously declares in prose in *epist.* 49.5. His competence as a musicologist in the cultural milieu of Nero's reign (Wille 1967: 338–350; Luque Moreno 1997) stands in stark contrast to these protests, and indeed, Christian authors aside, Seneca is undoubtedly the most important Latin lyric poet after Horace and until Boethius's *metra* in the *Consolatio* (Traina 2002: 6).³

If lyrical meters, including those in the monodies, undoubtedly signaled a change in psychological pace, it is notoriously difficult to attribute an *ethos* to the choruses (Biondi 1997b: 65 f.; Traina 2000: 60) without running into the pitfalls of circular reasoning, forced interpretations, and ambivalent results. For example, according to Marx (1932), Seneca reserves anapaests in choruses for “catastrophic” or philosophical themes, the sapphic meter for weak registers, the glyconic for songs of praise or philosophical content, and the first asclepiadean for a “local” function. Bishop (1964 and 1968: 209–219), gives completely different interpretations, linking the anapaest to the instability of human conditions, the sapphic meter to control exercised by higher external powers, the glyconic to celebration, and the first asclepiadean to the divine. In turn, Hiltbrunner (1985: 990) finds easy fault with Bishop's theories, as does Carande Herrero (1998: 113 f.), who rightly focuses on aspects related to the intrinsic *habitus* of each meter.

Dangel (2001) continues with a flexible and systematic approach, whose main points are as follows. Seneca's lyric (p. 199) is “un corpus métrique en théâtralité”: 1) the rare hexametric pieces, with their skillfully inlaid

³ There are several detailed works, including various attempts to solve the challenging colometric problems, on the metrical and lyrical techniques that Seneca exploited in the choruses of his tragedies. On anapaests, cf. Mantke 1957–1958, Zwierlein 1983, Opelt 1986, and Fitch 1987a (compare with Luck 1989 on *Octavia*); on Horatian meters, Carande Herrero 1998; on the dactylic tetrameter, Przychocki 1936; on polyphonic and polymetric *cantica*, Strzelecki 1951, Giomini 1959, Pighi 1963: 171–175, and Tarrant 1976: 372–381; and in general, cf. first Leo 1897: 514–518, then Przychocki 1932, Bishop 1964, Carnevali Noli 1973, and Grimal 1978b: 240–245.

dactylic and spondaic constituents, achieve a formal stateliness, in ironic contrast with the impending menace of the events they refer to; 2) the anapaests, i.e., “counter-dactyls,” are appropriate to contexts where heroic values are overturned and the course of insurmountable events proceeds until the tension comes to a climax; 3) Horatian meters are applied at the micro-structural level, with a more selective verbal metric; to ensure a more symbiotic relationship between syllable/metric and musical rhythm, while at the macro-structural level the substitution of strophes with “stanzas” accentuates the dramatic effect: a) the brevity of the glyconic meter is suited to the expression of a more modest moral; b) the moderate length of the sapphic, somewhere between subjective lyricism and philosophical reflection, befits volatile and anguished but not yet catastrophic situations; and c) the first asclepiadean, the most vehement, is used to express the sublime, strong contrasts, and universal assertions; 4) the polyphonic *mutatis modis cantica* (CMM) assemble in large sequences with a free scheme, “stanzas” composed with the meters described so far, juxtaposing the various expressive potentials of their rhythms to obtain diverse representations of meaning; 5) polymetric *cantica* in *cola libera* (CL) combine in “asynarteta” collages, metrically distinct hemistichs of a wide array of meter types, mostly drawn from Horatian lyric meters, to obtain richly varying degrees of pathos.

Although this is difficult to prove, Seneca is probably influenced by contemporary derivational theories (Soubiran 1991: 369–375, Dangel 2001: 269–280, Luque Moreno 2004a: 223–226), especially by the doctrine of Caesius Bassus.

The changing geometry of this combinational play reveals an experimental Seneca, deeply engaged in forging a theatrical instrument, the lyrical chorus, of prime strategic importance to his dramaturgy. Dangel (2001: 291) observes in conclusion that Seneca’s meters “remplissent très précisément ce rôle: avec eux, on quitte le langage de la conscience claire pour passer à l’expression du trouble et de l’émotion. Chaque type métrique en stances suivies ou en polyphonie et polymétrie devient ainsi expression organique d’un état particulier de l’être”.

4. THEMATIC PARADIGMS

It must be pointed out at the outset that any discussion of the paradigmatic framework of the choral songs (see Traina’s 2002: 7–20 fine anthological reading) is incomplete without a look (cf. *infra*, § 5) at the dialectic of their

relationship with the surrounding action. Cattin (1963, cf. already Cattin 1956) assumes that Seneca's choruses have constructive, pedagogic finalities and that some may thus even have been written separately without the initial intention of including them in a play. The outcome is a cold classification of lyric themes into "philosophical" ("man facing his destiny"; "man confronting the fickleness of fortune"; "future life and immortality"), "pathetic" ("crime and punishment," "laments"), and "picturesque" ("astronomy," "seas," "winds and navigation," and "hunting"), with no attempt to find the underlying semantic connections with the dramatic context.

Gil Arroyo (1979) is also preoccupied with finding a *Dichterphilosoph* in the choruses, Seneca's lyrical expression of his doctrinal positions on matters such as death, passion, fortune, and fate. Although there are some more positive attempts to see in the chorus an explanation of the dramatic context, ultimately he concludes (p. vi) that the choral songs are completely detached from the action.

In a decidedly more perceptive investigation, Davis (1993) systematically surveyed the themes in choral songs, dividing them into three large categories: mythology, philosophy, and prayer. Many times he notes the ironic counterpoint to the surrounding action in the chorus and correctly concludes (p. 183) that "we are dealing not with the work of a philosopher, but with the work of a dramatist using philosophy for dramatic ends."

A useful approach to the lyrical themes in Seneca's tragedies is undoubtedly that of identifying the ideologically charged leitmotifs that run through them. One well-defined and thoroughly studied theme is *aurea mediocritas*, which harks to the Delphic precept and Horatian moral. It is about the modest but conscious existential *stringere litora*, that guarantees safely reaching *senectus* (Grisoli 1971, Petrone 1981, Giancotti 1989, Mader 1990, Mazzoli 1990, Monteleone 1991: 224–232, Gasti 1992, Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1992, 1993–1994 and 1996), and as a dramaturgical device it serves to offset the sociological and ethical gap between the level of the chorus members and the tragic level of the powerful protagonists: cf. at least *Herc. f.* I, *Phaedr.* IV, *Oed.* IV, *Ag.* I, *Thy.* II, and also *Herc. O.* II and *Octavia* IV.

Another prominent lyrical feature is the hymnodic character with an aretalogical function or as a direct prayer to a vast variety of divine or chthonic entities (Traina 1967–1968; La Bua 1999: 297–324), very marked in *Herc. f.* IV, *Med.* I (and in the monody in 752–842), *Phaedr.* I (also in the prologue monody in 54–84), *Oed.* II, *Ag.* I, II, IV, and also in *Herc. O.* V and VI.

The schetliastic and sympathetic motif characterizing the *kommoi* of the women prisoners in *Tro.* I and *Ag.* III, seen again in *Herc. O.* I (Aricò 1996, 2006, Castagna 2006, Monella 2006), is also important because—as we shall

see (cf. *infra*, § 5)—it is in contrast with the main devices used by Seneca to express the relationship between chorus and action.

Some choruses have also attracted attention because of the singularity of their semantics (some even with respect to the thoughts of the philosopher), especially the famously disconsolate song *Tro. II*, which denies any eschatological prospects for Man (Soler 1966, Corsaro 1982, Marino 1996b, Kugelmeier 2001); or *Med. II*, the denouncement of the Argonauts' *nefas* (Biondi 1984), closed with the contested "prophecy" of the New World (Moretti 1986, Bajoni 1996); or the "triumph" of Love, *Phaedr. I*, with its allusions to Virgil and Ovid (Argenio 1973, Davis 1984, Cozzolino 1998, Landolfi 2006). Ovid's influence in the choruses in *Herc. f.* and *Med.* has already been systematically ascertained by Kapnukajas (1930) and in the entire corpus of Seneca's tragedy by Jakobi (1988). At times, it is some peculiarity of the mythical paradigms that invites critical examination: cf. Segal (1983), Rivoltella (1996), Landolfi (1999), Casamento (2006).

5. SYNTAGMATIC COHESION IN THE CHORUSES

In the absence of concrete evidence that Seneca's plays were performed, the main theoretical and technical problem that confronts us is whether they were in fact meant to be presented in this way. One way to approach this problem is through a thorough evaluation of the function of the chorus, bearing in mind that choral function in itself is a *quaestio vexata*, indeed *infinita*, in the study of Seneca (Biondi 1984: 47 n. 32, with a useful bibliographic reference).

Very briefly (see Mazzoli 1986–1987; cf. Kugelmeier 1999), the mimetic (as opposed to dramatic) function of the chorus in Seneca's plays declined in line with a general tendency in the development of Greek theatre (especially in Euripides and Agatho, and in New Comedy). Hosius (1933) had already generalized that "der Chor [...] ruft beim Griechen aus der Situation heraus, berichtet beim Römer über die Situation, redet dort von der Sache, hier zur Sache" ("the chorus [...] in Greek tragedy speaks as part of the situation, in Roman tragedy it reports about the situation; in the former case it confronts the matter, in the latter it contributes something to it").

The lack of mimetic function in Senecan choruses has led some to draw the rather drastic conclusion that they are mere *embólíma*. Zwierlein (1966: 72–87), in particular, claims it is evidence of the "Rezitationsdramen" character he notoriously attributes to Senecan drama because a) the entrance of the chorus is not strongly marked; b) the chorus itself is not clearly distinguished;

c) there are contradictions between the choral songs and the action; and d) where a second chorus intervenes (e.g., in *Ag. III* of the Trojan women prisoners), its part in the scene is hard to reconcile with that of the first chorus (cf. Calder 1975). Counterbalancing these presumed troubles is a series of positive functions that are signaled (e.g., Dewey 1968) for the choruses: 1) marking of dramatic time; 2) announcement of the entrance of new characters; 3) giving information on events that have taken place off stage; 4) creating a temporal interlude; and 5) description of the state of a main character who is himself unable to give it. Grimal (1978b: 244) states that “un chant lyrique, dans ces conditions, est partie intégrante du spectacle” (“a lyric song, under these conditions, is an integral part of the performance”); and on the basis of metric analyses (cf. *supra*, pp. 565–567), Dangel (2001: 290) backs this up by saying that “spectaculaire, la lyrique chorale des tragédies de Sénèque l’est au point que l’on ne saurait mettre en doute la représentation de ces tragédies” (“the choral lyric of Seneca’s tragedies is so spectacular that one cannot doubt the performance of these tragedies”). *Tertium datur*: as Davis (2006) points out, Hill (2000) rather paradoxically exploits the arguments of the “recitalists” (defective identity of the chorus members, scarce indication of their presence in scenes, and limited integration with the action) to construct a Senecan ethic of incoherence that is compatible with the performance of the plays.

In view of the differing viewpoints, it is important to evaluate, without prejudice and focusing only on the salient tendencies, the degree of syntagmatic coherence in the choral songs, exclusively, according to how they “work” at a dramatic level within the written texts that have come down to us.

While the Greek chorus, which has a sympathetic and homological “view” of the action, is an excellent catalyzer of the *fabula*, the Senecan chorus can also legitimately be described as a “reagent” which, when introduced into the ordered and monodirectional structure of the *fabula* itself, disrupts it, alters it, and reorganizes it into the very differently interwoven and oriented lines of the “plot.” The paradigmatic functions carried out by traditional choral lyric through the varying dosage of *kairós*, *mythos*, and *gnome* should be interpreted in Seneca not only for themselves, but in the light of strategies operating at a syntagmatic level: the chorus contributes meaning to the context, but at the same time this meaning is justified by the context. To continue with the chemistry metaphor, the “reaction” between chorus and context transforms the semantic “composition” of both; to activate the reaction various elements must be added now and then.

Two features in particular hallmark Senecan “chorality,” transcending microtextual contingencies: contrastivity and anachrony.

The first of these features has already been focused on by several critics. “Gerade von der Kontrastwirkung”—summarizes Hiltbrunner (1985: 990)—“hat Seneca, indem er ein Kunstmittel der sophokleischen Tragödie übersteigert, häufig Gebrauch gemacht” (“it is in particular the contrast effect that Seneca, intensifying an artistic means of Sophoclean tragedy, frequently used”). The antiphrasticity of the initial chorus with respect to the monologic prologue, a point of crucial ideological moment in Seneca’s drama, has particular prominence in most of the tragedies (*Herc. f.*, *Med.*, *Ag.*, *Thy.*, and *Herc. O.*). Biondi (1984: 30) observed that “lo scontro e nello stesso tempo il binomio di monologo e coro rappresentano una sorta di grande antitesi costruita per asindeto: [...] un vero e proprio a priori del pensiero e dello stile di Seneca.” (“the clash and juxtaposition of monologue and chorus at the same time represent a sort of great antithesis built by asyndeton.”) These observations, referring mainly to *Med.* I, an *epithalamium* (cf. also Hine 1989), go with those of Perutelli (1989), who showed that there is also antithesis in the finale of the chorus with respect to the episode that follows.

Indeed, the choral function of contrastivity, intensified by the effects of “hybridité générique” (Wasiolka 2007: 77 f.), is not limited to the first juncture with the action. Take *Phaedr.*, where the chorus, after Hippolytus’s lyric prologue, only intervenes, as we know (cf. *supra*, § 2), when the *mimesis* has already begun with the famous *agon* between Phaedra, enslaved by the *furor* of love, and the nurse who incarnates *ratio*. In 195–217 the nurse demystifies and demythifies the power of love. It is the chorus that then highlights her rationalism by contrasting it in an exaltation of the mythological hypostasis of this power, the god *Amor*. Summarizing the action of the chorus throughout *Herc. f.*, Shelton (1978: 40–49) defines it as “a basically non-partisan observer whose philosophy provides a counterpoint to the philosophies of the other characters” (p. 42); “its words do not affect the movement of the plot, but they definitely influence the development of the theme. The frightened men of the chorus present a dramatic personality whose participation in the tragedy is essential” (p. 49).

The other tragedies provide plenty of examples. One is the disturbing effect produced by the joyous choral songs of praise to gods (e.g., *Oed.* II, well analyzed by Mantovanelli 1996; and *Ag.* II) or heroes (*Herc. f.* III, *Ag.* IV), which arise out of the blue in contexts saturated with tragic tension; another is the marked antiheroic attitude of the chorus in stark contrast to the tragic greatness of the protagonists.

There are relatively few instances of choruses in sympathy with the action. Among them there are the two female *kommōi* in *Tro.* I and *Ag.* III (Aricò 1996 and 2006), and *Oed.* I. The latter adheres so closely to Oedipus's desolate prologue that Lefèvre (1980) assumes that the chorus is a re-expression of the prologue as an interior monologue. Although he does not accord such an impersonal status to the chorus, Caviglia (1996) does recognize its solidarity with the protagonist throughout the play.

Scarce sympathy also implies detachment from the logical and chronological cogency of the *fabula*. Distance from the action is indeed minimal when a chorus is at the middle point of its competency as witness, relative entirely to the *kairós* of the single scene, but increases to a maximum at the two poles: zero competency (with a marked effect of tragic irony), and full competency, dominating the web of the plot in the universal perspective of *gnome*.

When these two poles coexist in a scene, in a simultaneously blind and prophetic chorus ("the uninformed informer": Stevens 1992) that knows too little and yet too much, the *fabula* breaks down, resulting in a defusing of the dramatic energy that leaves an indelible sign on the ideology of the play. It is extremely simplistic to dismiss these cases as "Widersprüche zwischen Chorlied und Handlung" ("contradictions between chorus and action", Zwierlein 1966: 76–80).

It is at this precise moment that the other, less-studied "plot device" in Senecan choruses intervenes: anachrony, i.e., when the chronological relationship of the song to the action is loose, with brusque passages and absorption of large tracts of real time. Among the numerous examples, these stand out: *Herc. f.* III, *Tro.* III, *Med.* II, *Phaedr.* III, *Oed.* IV, *Ag.* II, and *Thy.* II. Intensifying this effect is a sometimes subliminal filigree of prolepsis and distant call and response between the chorus and the action by means of homology or antithesis, and "off-field" interventions of the choral voice that abruptly override the mythical paradigm to give dramatic glimpses of the *nunc* of the Roman author. An example is the *epiphonema* that closes *Herc. f.* I (*alte virtus animosa cadit*), unquestionably a dazzling anticipation of the destiny that will befall the protagonist. Other examples are the denunciation of the *pervius orbis* of the Roman Empire in the underlying structure of *Med.* 364–379 and the strident *Quiritibus* anachronism in *Thy.* 396. Here, in the crucial *Thy.* II, we find the most obvious instance of prolepsis in Seneca's choruses: the Stoic theme of *autárkeia*—refuge in inner *regnum*—to which the "repentant" Thyestes (446–470) will soon have recourse, with ideological implications of primary importance. *Thy.* III, with references to the frustrating political reality of Seneca's day, is in clear antithesis to the hopes of the bucolic Virgil (Monteleone 1991: 219–290).

But Seneca's use of anachrony and contrastivity peaks in the fourth and last song in *Thy.* (Picone 1984: 106–115, Mazzoli 1986–1987: 104 f., Volk 2006): the chorus's images of chaos and universal ruin not only set up a strident ironic conflict with Atreus's subsequent monologue—which is in fact permeated with sublime *hybris* (885–889)—but especially here subtract a gaze blinded by *timor* from the contingencies of the moment to project it into the timeless dimension of absolute clairvoyance of *ekpyrosis*, Stoic philosophy's final destiny of the world.

The seven tragedies of certain Senecan authorship that have choruses can be classified on the basis of their degree of syntagmatic cohesion (presence or absence of explicit or implicit initial and final links between chorus and action; and absorption of stage time during each song), according to the increasing abstraction of these choruses from the action and, in the author's opinion, to an increasing refinement of Seneca's dramaturgical strategy (Mazzoli 2006: 18–22), as follows: *Phaedr.*, *Tro.*, *Oed.*, *Ag.*, *Herc. f.*, *Med.*, and *Thy.* The last three are the same as those also identified *supra* (§ 2) as being Seneca's most mature tragedies.

6. STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONS OF THE CHORUS

There is no justification for maintaining that Seneca's choruses tend not to be “integrated plausibly into the play” (Davis 2006: 57): the connections with the dramatic context are certainly semantic rather than mimetic, starting from keywords that form subtle dialectical bridges or, at the least, ideological indicators referring to the immediately surrounding action at the beginning or end of choruses (complete analysis in Mazzoli 2006: 22–41).

Nevertheless, it is above all in the macrotextual structure of the plays that the full strategic importance of the choruses can be appreciated. A good example emerges from the comparison (Petrone 2006) of the two tragedies *Troades* and *Phoenissae*, whose titles in the manuscript of *Etruscus* suggest a preeminent role for their choruses but which, in the texts that have come down to us, are in fact poles apart: while *Troades* confirms this idea, *Phoenissae* actually lacks choral parts and thus presents a series of technical problems suggesting that it was never completed (Mazzoli 2002: 165–168).

Referring to the choruses in *Med.*, Bishop (1965) introduced the useful notion of an “odic line” running parallel to and intensifying the “dramatic line” of action until the final catastrophe. More generally, Seneca's choral songs are far from merely being reciprocally disconnected *embóloma*. Taken singly, they all relate to the dramatic action that surrounds and makes space for

them. Taken as a whole within each tragedy, “i cori organizzano un superiore o sottostante sistema semantico che, attraverso le connotazioni, gli scarti, le dislocazioni, si “oppone”—nel senso strutturale del termine—a quello della *fabula*, investendo di ideologia i miti consunti della secolare tradizione tragica”, Mazzoli 1986–1987: 108 and 1996: 9).

Going further, Traina (2002: 7) proposes an entirely “hypertextual” reading of the entire body of Senecan choruses, connecting it “a tre livelli, con il *corpus* drammatico, con le opere prosastiche, col contesto extralinguistico, la realtà politica e sociale del tempo” (“on three levels, with the dramatic *corpus*, the prose works and the extra-linguistic context, that is the political and social reality of the times”).

Within each tragedy, the body of choruses organizes itself around a congruous semantic order that is often supported in single songs (cf. *supra*, 1.1) by the morphology of the *kairós*, *mythos*, *gnome* sequences. In some dramas this order (Mazzoli 1996: 10–14) appears to have an “open” alternating structure of mainly positive and mainly negative connotations between successive choruses. This effect is less clear-cut in *Oed.*, which irregularly has five choruses, but is particularly evident in *Tro.* and *Phaedr.*

In the remaining tragedies of certain authenticity, there is an increasing tendency toward a “closed” symmetrical structure in which the two polar and the two intermediate choruses are in opposition to one another. Again, along with *Ag.*, which seems to bridge the two techniques, we find grouped together the three plays that, in the author’s opinion, are the most mature of Seneca’s theatrical works: *Herc. f.*, *Med.*, and *Thy.* In *Thy.* this structure reaches *Ringkomposition* formality (Davis 1989; Marino 1992), with the first and fourth chorus respectively projected behind and ahead of the myths of the past and the future, and the second and third chorus spectacularly immersed in the deceptive present of “power.” In this more evolved and cohesive dramatic architecture, the beginning and end choruses are the bearing structures of a circular “closure,” forcing the action, by now close to the *katastrophé*, to turn on itself and look at its generative mythologema, while the “facing” second and third choruses compress the middle scene, the ideological “condenser” around which the drama rotates, to implosion.

We are looking at an experiment in theatrical textuality, with all that this implies for the *vexata quaestio* of performance, which had reached its final stages and which would become a fundamental model of reference for future European dramaturgy.

THE RHETORIC OF RATIONALITY AND IRRATIONALITY

Gottfried Mader

Seneca *tragicus* is back in fashion. With growing interest in the passions, the *Affektstil* has also been rehabilitated and can now usefully be discussed as an overarching rhetoric of irrationality (answered occasionally by a contrapuntal voice of reason).¹ Irrationality and rationality, that is, from the distinctive postclassical perspective of a philosopher-poet-courtier whose theoretical interest in these matters was supplemented by personal observations at the epicenter of the unstable and theatricalized Neronian universe. Understood thus, “rhetoric of irrationality” might describe the characteristically “inverted” grandiloquence of gigantic, self-centered and overheated passion figures, a register that evinces not *magnitudo animi* but the *tumor* of a frenzied soul. The opposition at *De ira* 1.20.1f. is pertinent:

Ne illud quidem iudicandum est, aliquid iram ad magnitudinem animi conferre; non est enim illa magnitudo: tumor est. [...] omnes, quos vecors animus supra cogitationes extollit humanas, altum quiddam et sublime spirare se credunt: ceterum nil solidi subest [...]. tantumque abest a magnitudine animi, quantum a fortitudine audacia, a fiducia insolentia [...].

An analogous dichotomy informs the tragic rhetoric, where the fulminating *irati* produce a distinctly “alternative” version of the sublime.

Seneca typically treats passion *as process*, playing out according to a self-regulating logic and with defining moments clearly demarcated in a manner that recalls *De ira*’s evolutionary model (*quemadmodum incipiant affectus aut crescant aut efferantur*: 2.4.1; cf. 2.1.3–5; 2.3.1–5). For clarity’s sake it is useful to take a structural approach and zoom in on some typical moments and recurrent emphases in this cycle. For anger, notes Seneca, affects not just the physical aspect of its victims (1.1.3–7; 2.35.3–6; 3.4.1–3) but also their utterances (2.35.5; 3.4.2f.). This applies equally to his

¹ On Seneca’s comeback, see Calder 1976b and 1998. On aspects of the tragic rhetoric, see Hansen 1934; Specka 1937; Wanke 1964: 15–154; Seidensticker 1969: 85–199 and 1985; Braden 1970 and 1985: 28–62; Liebermann 1974; Lefèvre 1978d: 54–66; Rosenmeyer 1989: 177–187; and von Albrecht 2004: 99–129. On the passions, see Regenbogen 1927–1928; Trabert 1953; Wanke 1964: 169–175; Staley 1975 and 1982; Bäumer 1982; Dupont 1995: 55–90; and Gill 1997.

dramatic creations whose condition is designated by themselves and others as pathological and whose frenzied outbursts give the impression that they have read *De ira*. Speakers parading self-consciously as passion figures adopt a distinctive tonality and draw on a common repertoire of tropes in giving voice to their *affectus*. This is also the voice of a new age, where compulsive self-centeredness is itself predicated on larger shifts and fault lines. With the demise of the hierarchic and integrating republican cosmos, self replaces state as ultimate reference point for deracinated individuals; and in the new world order reflected in the tragedies, the quest for selfhood leads occasionally to a transcendental Stoically tinged autarky (Cassandra, Antigone, *vetus* Thyestes), more spectacularly to its diametrical mirror image (Medea, Atreus, Oedipus, Phaedra).² Rationality and irrationality, with their respective registers, are organically and dichotomously related as *Welt* and *Gegenwelt*. The rhetoric captures the calibrated nuances. In what follows, I first describe the features and discern the motives for the “irrational” style at typical moments in the affective cycle, and then deal similarly with the “rational” register.

1. SELF AS CENTER: THE RHETORIC OF IRRATIONALITY

1.1. *Self-Incitement*

Senecan characters from first appearance typically articulate their emotions so precisely that their frenzied rhetoric converges somewhat paradoxically with the analytical gaze of the philosopher-commentator of *De ira*. Atreus, Medea, Clytemnestra and others are seized by irresistible passions that they successively ponder, verbalize, and rationalize, thus also constructing a distinctive rhetorical identity for themselves. This introspection occurs typically in monologues of self-reproach or self-exhortation when characters meditate revenge, or in the moments preceding a climactic enormity.³ Thus Medea's paradigmatic outburst (*Med.* 40–55):

Per viscera ipsa quaere supplicio viam,
si vivis, anime, si quid antiqui tibi
remanet vigoris; pelle femineos metus

² On the new sense of isolation and its literary reflexes, see Burck 1971: 92–102; Lefèvre 1972b: 2–7 and 1978b: 22–24; Williams 1978: 171–180; Littlewood 2004: 18–36, 40–47.

³ *Herc. f.* 75–82; *Phoen.* 44–50, 155–165; *Med.* 26–55, 951–957; *Oed.* 936–957, 1024–1032; *Ag.* 108–124, 192–202; *Thy.* 176–204; *Herc. O.* 308–314.

et inhospitalem Caucasum mente indue.
 quodcumque vidit Phasis aut Pontus nefas,
 videbit Isthmos. effera ignota horrida,
 tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala
 mens intus agitat: vulnera et caedem et vagum
 funus per artus—levia memoravi nimis:
 haec virgo feci; gravior exurgat dolor:
 maiora iam me scelera post partus decent.
 accingere ira teque in exitium para
 furore toto. paria narrentur tua
 repudia thalamis: quo virum linques modo?
 hoc quo secuta es. rumpe iam segnes moras:
 quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus.

On the one hand, drastic specifics to index emotional intensity (entrails, wounds, creeping death), on the other, a penetrating self-diagnosis centering on the *dolor-ira-furor* complex—producing a characteristic alternation between monumental self-absorption and detached self-observation. For all her frenzy Medea remains an acute commentator on her own condition (similarly *Tro.* 642–662; *Med.* 926–957; *Phaedr.* 177–185, 602–605, 636–644, 698f.; *Ag.* 131–144;⁴ *Thy.* 260–266, 423–428, 434–439). The first-person *agens* is largely elided by personified emotions that assume a driving and visceral presence. Medea, addressing her *animus* (*Med.* 41, 895, 937, 976, 988), virtually assigns it the status of a *dramatis persona* outside her speaking self; and as her frenzy swells, she successively apostrophizes also *dolor*, *ira*, and *furor* as external entities (139f., 897, 914, 916, 930, 944, 953).⁵ Where outside observers describe the passion figure psychosomatically through physical appearance, metaphors, and the like (174f., 186f., 380–396, 445f., 579–594, 849–865), the speaking subject typically reifies emotion to index the affective spiral and the emergence of the affective self. Displacement of the first person in particular has a distancing effect, giving these psychograms a rational-analytical rather than an emotional bias: the “intellectual transposition of pathos,” the “cool, emotionless hypertrophy of pathos” that is a signature of the mannerist

⁴ An extreme case: Clytemnestra identifies no fewer than five competing impulses (*dolor*, *timor*, *invidia*, *cupido turpis*, *pudor*) and maps their progression in minute detail (*medullas*, *cor*, *pectus*, *animus*, *mens*); cf. Trabert 1953: 15.

⁵ On the characteristic outward “deflection,” see Rosenmeyer 1989: 186f. On *animus* and emotions personified and apostrophized, see Leo 1908: 106–108 (“*animus* ist fast immer die Zusammenfassung der Leidenschaften, die zur Tat drängen oder drängen sollen”); Liebermann 1974: 86–95, 120–124; Tarrant 1976: 194f. (ad *Ag.* 108); Tietze Larson 1994: 51–53; and Fitch and McElduff 2002: 31f.

style.⁶ In this sense the rituals of self-incitement symmetrically invert the philosophical self-examination and psychagogic monologue that lead to true wisdom.⁷

1.2. *Self-Fashioning*

Seneca's protagonists are massively obsessed with selfhood, and their rhetorical project is substantially a quest for self-identity. "Die senecaischen Helden nehmen keine Person so wichtig wie die eigene" ("Senecan heroes take no one as seriously as themselves," Lefèvre 1978d: 62); they exhibit "eine Art egoistisches Sendungsbewußtsein" ("a kind of egotistical sense of mission," Seeck 1978: 412). Corinthian Medea, *expulsa supplex sola deserta*, is literally a person without an address (*Med.* 118–120, 207–210, 451–458); Thyestes's treachery threatens to extinguish Atreus's personal and political self (*Thy.* 236–241); through acts of vengeance—and an elaborate rhetoric of self-definition—that identity is systematically reclaimed and triumphantly re-asserted (*Med.* 982–984, 1021; *Thy.* 887, 1006, 1096–1099). Seneca's Medea is presented not as a completed character but as a character under construction, moving purposefully from recognition of her potential for *nefas* to activating it, in the process paradigmatically illustrating also the rhetoric of self-fashioning (*Medea superest—Medea fiam—Medea nunc sum*). With her Corinthian prospects destroyed, she falls back on her *antiquus vigor* demarcated by Caucasus, Phasis, and Pontus (43–45). As motivational psychology, invocation of an ideal self-image is a kind of psycho-cybernetics *ante litteram* in which self-definition doubles as self-incitement by fixing a standard for emulation. This self-definition is articulated most pointedly through self-naming as "a way of defining who one *should* be, an index of the gap between one's present performance and one's ideal role"; so, emblematically, when the nurse appeals to Medea by name, and Medea "turns the name into a promise—*fiam*, 'I shall *become* Medea' (171)";⁸ or when in Atreus's celebrated opening lines self-naming is coupled with self-reproach and recognition of his ideal role:

⁶ Leeman 1976: 212. Cf. Liebermann 1974: 55 (ad *Oed.* 936–951): "Das Ganze klingt wie ein hölzerner Syllogismus. Gerade in dieser verstandesmäßigen Nüchternheit liegt die erschreckende Grausamkeit begründet. So schweißt Seneca Kalkül und Pathos, Kalt und Heiß zusammen. In der Verbindung der Extreme, dieser fast unerträglichen Spannung tut sich der Barockstil kund"; Tarrant 1976: 199 (ad *Ag.* 132 f.): the "combination of emotional chaos and detached intellectual analysis"; Lefèvre 1978d: 64 f.; Seeck 1978: 412–419.

⁷ On which see, e.g., *dial.* 5 (= *de ira* 3).36, with Rabbow 1954: 180–200.

⁸ Fitch and McElduff 2002: 25. Psycho-cybernetics (self-motivational psychology) as popularized by Maltz 1960 is substantially anticipated by Seneca *philosophus*.

ignave, iners, enervis et (quod maximum / probrum tyranno rebus in summis reor) / inulte [... / ...] questibus vanis agis / iratus Atreus? (*Thy.* 176–180). Of this rousing rhetoric it has well been remarked that “the past figures insofar as it supplies motive for response, but the real business is Atreus’s confrontation with a self-image to live up to” (Braden 1985: 42).

The expectations and obligations inherent in an identity are further indexed through formulaic *decet* and *dignus*, often in reference to the speaker’s own exemplary misdeeds or other carefully chosen precedents. Underlying Medea’s *maiora iam me scelera post partus decent* (50) is an inverted sense of propriety that constructs a version of herself out of her own past, exponentially extending prior proclivities to a level commensurate with present status: being worthy of herself is both a psychological imperative and a matter of self-consistency on a sliding scale of criminality.⁹ Accordingly, the progression toward *scelus*, simultaneously an assertion of selfhood, is signposted by references to her earlier identity, culminating in *iam iam recepi sceptrum germanum patrem, / spoliūque Colchi pecudis auratae tenent; / rediere regna, rapta virginitas redit* (982–984)—thus completing a circle that began with the invocation of *inhospitalem Caucasum* (43). Medea, that is, becomes the consummate version of herself (910); prior deeds give shape and meaning to new enormities.¹⁰ *Scelera te hortentur tua / et cuncta redeant* (129 f.) says Medea, whose latest *scelera* consciously replay her *antiquus vigor* (16 f., 41–45, 52–55, 129–134, 397 f., 671 f., 866 f., 903 f., 936, 951–953, 963–971).¹¹

But if spectacular crimes draw inspiration from personal past and mythological precedent, they also surpass those prior acts. Senecan characters

⁹ Agonistic *decet*, *dignus*, *exemplum*: *Herc. f.* 111 f.; *Phoen.* 331–339, 357; *Oed.* 879, 977; *Ag.* 34, 52, 124; *Thy.* 242–243, 271; with Braden 1970: 16–18 (“programmatic rituals of self-encouragement”), 22 f.; 1985: 43–46.

¹⁰ Cf. Liebermann 1974: 193: “Sie ist sich treu geblieben [...] als die immer Gleiche.” The Colchian identity (982–984) is pure symbol, since a literal return is impossible (451–458).

¹¹ Obsession with congruence produces a studied rhetoric of equivalence: Medea’s crimes at her divorce will replicate those at her marriage (*Med.* 16 f., 52–55, 397 f.); Oedipus’s self-mutilation, answering his unnatural birth, matches the enormity it atones for (*Oed.* 942–951, 975–977); as *senex* he craves death, where he should have died in infancy (*Phoen.* 27–38, where note *reposcit—redde—restituē—recipe—antiqua supplicia*), wants to turn on himself the sword that killed Laius (105–107), or to die at the sphinx’s seat (118 f.); Hercules’s renunciation of suicide is measured by the standard of his own earlier labors (*Herc. f.* 1274–1277, 1316 f.); Theseus calls upon himself the same punishment he had earlier inflicted on Sinis (*Phaedr.* 1219–1225). See Liebermann 1974: 158 f.; Fitch and McElduff 2002: 29; Lefèvre 1997a: 72 f. Such congruence is often indexed by forms of *par*, *iustus*, *respondere*, *imitari* (*Phoen.* 242 f.; *Med.* 52, 398; *Phaedr.* 1222; *Oed.* 878–889, 925 f., 976 f.; *Ag.* 906 f.).

think big.¹² Obsessed with the sheer scale of their enormities, they compete with themselves and their role models to produce a distinctive rhetoric of transgression in which antecedent atrocities constitute a prologue to the transcendental *nefas*. Thus Medea early in the drama—*levia memoravi nimis; / haec virgo feci; gravior exurgat dolor: / maiora iam me scelera post partus decent. / accingere ira, teque in exitium para / furore toto* (48–52)—subsequently extending this logic until her *ira* assumes cosmic proportions (393–396, 401–414, 423–428, 563 f., 671–675, 690–693, 896, 902–915, 992, 1011). Noblesse oblige. Terms like *maius*, *altius*, *crescere*, *augescere*, and *vincere* signal the upward spiral towards self-realization (*Medea nunc sum*), conceived as a perverse apotheosis. So too with Atreus, paradigmatic exponent of the self-surpassing style: compulsively agonistic and striving for the transcendental *nefas* in a universe that knows no limits (*nec sit irarum modus: Thy.* 26), he races feverishly from one apex to the next, expressing himself characteristically through the vocabulary of competition (*certare, crescere, implere, superare, vincere, novum*)¹³ and the distinctive *comparativus Senecanus*, Seidensticker's (1985) term for the self-inflationary tendency that marks his rhetoric of transgression (*nescioquid animus maius et solito amplius / supraque fines moris humani tumet / instatque pigris manibus—haud quid sit scio, / sed grande quiddam est: 267–270; cf. Phoen.* 352–354).

1.3. *Nefas* as “Newspeak”

Inausa audere implies the paradox of its own adequate articulation. Speakers grappling to express monumental *nefas* through conventional categories recognize the constraints of naming, indexed in turn through ingenious slip-pages. As protagonists in a spiraling *certamen nequitiae* transcend traditional boundaries, standard “dictionary” definitions, too, become destabilized: *terminus omnis motus* (*Med.* 369). In this rhetorical universe the monumental act, located beyond “normal” notions of good and evil, is verbalized as a kind of “newspeak” based on a calculus of inversion, and defines itself in relation to the standards it repudiates: “Die Umkehr des Üblichen wird das Übliche, die Andersartigkeit wird Standard, die Gegensätzlichkeit zum eigentlich

¹² The taste for the monumental comes out especially in the hypertrophic catalogues, capturing the desire for all-embracing totality (*Med.* 670–739; *Oed.* 248–256), and in grand prayers for elemental convulsion (*Herc. f.* 1202–1218; *Phaedr.* 671–684, 1231–1242; *Oed.* 868–879; *Thy.* 1006–1019; *Herc. O.* 845–855, 938–956). See also Liebermann 1974: 186 f.; Braden 1985: 48–62; and Rosenmeyer 1989: 160–203.

¹³ Trabert 1953: 54: “Dieses agonistische Übertrumpfenwollen ist im Grunde nichts anderes als das in sein Gegenteil verkehrte *aei aristeuein*.”

Gegebenen wird zum Prinzip.”¹⁴ Conventional norms figure only as variables on a scale leading up to a still more spectacular *nefas*. Medea, Atreus, and Oedipus call attention to their own rhetorical practice and demonstrate how an “Umwertung der Werte” (“re-evaluation of values”) translates into a corresponding “Umwortung der Worte” (“transvaluation of words”).

Medea, fresh from the murder of Creon and Creusa, trivializes everything that precedes the impending *ultimum scelus*; having literally outgrown her *puellaris furor*, she re-designates prior acts as mere precursors to the climactic infanticide (*Med.* 900–901, 904–910):

Fas omne cedat, abeat expulsus pudor;
vindicta *levis* est quam ferunt purae manus [...]
[...] quidquid admissum est adhuc,
pietas vocetur. hoc age! en faxo sciant
quam *levia* fuerint quamque *vulgaris notae*
quae commodavi scelera. *prolusit* dolor
per ista noster: quid manus poterant *rudes*
audere magnum, quid *puellaris furor*?
Medea nunc sum: *crevit ingenium malis*.

In the quest for *maius solito*, “normal” notions of *scelera* become just steps in a staircase leading up to the ultimate chamber of horrors. For more nuanced differentiation, the lesser atrocities—although intrinsically horrific (130–134, 258–261, 911–915)—are paradoxically re-designated as positive or merely quotidian (*pietas—levia scelera—vulgaris notae*: 904–907; *fraude vulgari altius*: 693): a perfect illustration of the principle *ne vacet cuiquam vetus / odisse crimen: semper oriatur novum* (*Thy.* 29 f.). As in Thucydides’s account of the semantic anarchy in the brave new world at Corcyra (3.82.4 f.), evaluative and referent are re-aligned to reflect prevailing norms. Medea striving consciously for definitional precision—according to the *nefas* standard—enters a space beyond the range of the conventional moral lexicon. So, too, Oedipus, whose self-mutilation, first devised as an ingenious (un-Sophoclean) *mors longa* (*Oed.* 948–951), in *Phoenissae* is dismissed as altogether negligible (8), to be completed now with *mors tota* and total isolation (45–47, 167–172, 181, 224–229). In his sons he recognizes how the *certamen sceleris* elides normal notions (298–300), and from those beyond *scelus usitatum* (331–339) he expects a commensurate performance (352–358).

¹⁴ “Reversal of the usual becomes the usual, otherness becomes the norm, opposition to the original given becomes the principle”: Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002: 7 (of Trimalchio’s dinner party). This could also stand as motto for Seneca’s tragedies.

Thyestes finally takes the art of “precision talk” to new levels. Here the *mundus perversus* is indexed by gigantic dislocations: the upper world worse than hell (*Thy.* 74–83, 665–673); gods routed by the infamous *cena*; a region below Tartarus the only fitting prison for Atreus and Thyestes (1013–1019; cf. *Herc. f.* 1223–1226; *Phoen.* 143–145); Tantalus translated to another role (13), out of sync with himself and no longer just patient of punishment but its agent (86 f.); conventional morality disabled (*fas valuit nihil / aut commune nefas*: 138 f.; cf. 39, 47 f., 215–218, 249 f.); the cosmic order itself disrupted (*solitae mundi periere vices*: 813). Hence a corresponding rhetoric of inversion to register displacement of conventional categories:¹⁵ Tantalus as *innocens* compared with his still viler progeny (18–20); adultery a *levissimum facinus* (46 f.); *nefas* in “normal” fraternal relationships re-designated as *fas* in punishing Thyestes (219 f.); just slaying Thyestes as too unspectacular for the tyrant-artist who distinguishes between punishment as *process* and the *outcome* of that process (245–248, cf. 746 f., 1097 f.), that is, between the merely utilitarian and the consciously aesthetic;¹⁶ Atreus’s perversely ritual slaughter of the younger Tantalus as an act of “piety”—*primus locus (ne desse pietatem putes) / avo dicatur: Tantalus prima hostia est*: 717 f.—piety and propriety, that is, when *nefas* is conceived as a work of high art. The messenger’s account of the sacrifice brilliantly displays the *gradatio* technique that confounds conventional categories. Mere butchery would have been the act of a *pious* (744 f.); but (consistently with 245–248) the “normal” limit (*sceleris finem*) is now just a *gradus* and new beginning (746 f.). Even denial of burial or being devoured by wild beasts would have been desirable in comparison with what actually followed: from that perspective, mere *supplicium* is re-designated a *votum* (752, cf. 74–83). The messenger’s ingenious calibrations drive home the point that in this universe, passion and *nefas* are capable of infinite expansion (*nullum relinquam facinus et nullum est satis*: 256). Consistent attention to definitional fit and dislocation again has an intensely intellectual appeal, capturing a ghoulish fascination with quantification and pointing to a conscious aesthetic of *nefas*. The criminal artists’ “newspeak,” programmatically parting company from mundane standards, indexes their upward journey to a paradoxical autarky of evil.

¹⁵ Seidensticker 1969: 41 f.; Lefèvre 1970: 70 f.; Mader 2000.

¹⁶ Similarly, *miserum videre nolo, sed dum fit miser* (907); *perdideram scelus / nisi sic doleres* (1097 f.). On Atreus as aestheticist, see esp. *Thy.* 682–718, with Anliker 1960: 59 (Atreus concerned to act “stilgerecht”); Liebermann 1974: 73 f.; Lefèvre 1981: 34 f.; 1997b: 68–70.

1.4. *Self-Division and Conflicting Identities*

Several figures experience agonizing moments of self-division, articulated in a mannered rhetoric of conflicting emotions and identities: first confusion and uncertainty, then anguished introspection, finally one overriding passion asserting itself. Medea's grand monologue of self-division (*Med.* 893–977)¹⁷ is the most ornate example, exhibiting all the typical elements of this category: intense awareness of her conflict, internal dialogue, reification of competing passions, the “voice-over” effect or the “shift to narrative self-description in third-personal form [926–928, 937–944, 951–953] as though Medea has suddenly [...] become the narrator of her experiences instead of a speaking character” (Gill 1987: 33), passion and persona correlated, emotion externalized, rising and falling in turn, cues prompting associations, self-justification, finally the master passion triumphant and Medea's self-surrender. Fluctuating between anger at Jason and love of her children (the *dolor-ira-furor* complex against *amor-pietas*), Medea designates herself alternately as loving *mater* and slighted *coniunx*, caught in a vortex of conflicting impulses. Where Ovid's Medea, in a comparable internal dialogue (*met.* 7.11–71), constantly addresses herself (*frustra, Medea, repugnans*), Seneca's apostrophizes her *animus* and the driving passions *dolor, ira*, and *furor* as tangible presences.¹⁸ Introspection becomes a gigantic *psychomachia* in two movements, her monologue a veritable “moral and psychological echo-chamber” (Gill 1987: 33). I concentrate on lines 926–957. First (926–944), *mater* and resurgent *amor* recoil at infanticide: the inner struggle externalized by physical reflexes (*cor pepulit horror*: 926)—the mother in the ascendant (*ira discessit loco / materque tota coniuge expulsa redit*: 927 f.)¹⁹—maternal instincts voiced in the first person (929 f., 932, 936)—renewed vindictiveness cued by *innocentes* (936)—more balking (the retarding “Pathosformel” *quid, anime, titubas*)²⁰

¹⁷ Liebermann 1974: 191 and Auhagen 1999: 211 argue that since the resolve to kill the children is already fixed, Medea's fluctuations add nothing to her profile and function only to heighten pathos. From a rhetorical perspective, this very “artificiality” would make the monologue a model of its kind. Atreus had balked briefly (*Thy.* 283 f.); here Seneca amplifies Medea's indecision into an internalized *suasoria*, exhibiting a minute interest in passion as process (as *Thy.* 903–907).

¹⁸ See Auhagen 1999: 131–144, 211–215. Lucid awareness of self-division in Seneca characteristically “intellectualize[s] the expression of emotion” (Shelton 1979: 55).

¹⁹ Emotional division articulated through competing roles (*mater, coniunx*) also at *Tro.* 642–662 and *Phaedr.* 608–612, 623 f., 641–656, in the tradition of *Ov. met.* 6.619–635; 8.463–514. Cf. Trabert 1953: 44–48.

²⁰ Parallels in Liebermann 1974: 56 f.: “Ein letztes Zögern vor der großen entscheidenden Tat bedeutet nichts als eine Aufwertung des folgenden Ereignisses” (56).

with physical symptoms (*ora quid lacrimae rigant*: 937)—paralyzing (third-person) self-division (*variamque nunc huc ira, nunc illuc amor / diducit*: 938 f.) formally amplified in the marine simile (939–943)²¹—opposing forces evenly poised (*ira pietatem fugat / iramque pietas*)—the abrupt turnabout *cede pietati, dolor* (944): *coniunx* restrained by *mater*. Tension slackens, briefly. The children redirect Medea's thoughts to Jason and to vengeance (945–951), initiating a counter-movement: passion rekindled (*rursus increscit dolor / et fervet odium*: 951 f.)—further reluctance (*invitam manum*: 952)—then the climactic *ira, qua ducis, sequor* (953) and the murderous wish to surpass Niobe (954–956): *coniunx* triumphant over *mater*. And also reason over passion, for phraseology signals the crucial *assensus* that transforms the impulse (895) into a conscious act of will (969). With Medea's self-surrender (*sequor*),²² the preceding tension between (maternal) first-person and (externalizing) third-person is also resolved, the earlier *invita manus* now becomes a willing murder weapon (*utere hac, frater, manu*: 969).

Variants of the Medea model appear in several tragedies. Clytemnestra's conflict is a more complex emotional mix (*Ag.* 131–144), with *dolor* (at Iphigenia's death and Agamemnon's infidelities), *timor* (of retribution for her adultery), *invidia* (for her rival Cassandra), *cupido turpis* (for Aegisthus), and *pudor* (the impulse to chastity) wrestling violently,²³ but inconclusively. The marine simile (138–144) now indexes not just contrary emotions but conscious abdication of reason (*proinde omisi regimen e manibus meis*: 141), although it remains unclear which impulse will triumph (142 f.): Clytemnestra's open-ended *optimum est casum sequi* (144) is very different from Medea's purposeful *ira, qua ducis, sequor*. Self-division is articulated again through the rhetoric of competing personae, not now with Medea's third-person clarity (*materque tota coniuge expulsa redit*) but disclosed through the perspectives of the arguments themselves. Taking her cue from the nurse's appeal to *coniugi nomen sacrum* and *subolis ex illo tuae* (155, 157), Clytemnestra first disparages Agamemnon's title to *pater* (162–173): this is the angered mother. More galling still are his multiple infidelities (174–191): this is the adulteress whose obsession with this aspect is a projection mechanism that symmetri-

²¹ Also at *Phaedr.* 179–183; *Ag.* 138–143; *Thy.* 436–439; *Herc. O.* 710–712 (with Tietze 1987: 138–140 on the philosophical implications). In all cases, *illustrans* and *illustrandum* are meticulously aligned: Liebermann 1974: 88; Aygon 2004: 96–101.

²² *Sequor* indexing a *peripeteia* also at *Thy.* 100, 489.

²³ Drastic metaphorical language captures the psychic anguish: *excruciant—subdidit stimulos timor—pulsat—premit—mentis obsessae faces—rebellat*.

cally reflects (and deflects) her own guilt (cf. 110–118).²⁴ Remorse, apparently in response to the nurse's compelling counter-argument (203–225), briefly inclines Clytemnestra back to the wife (239–243, 260 f.); but then Aegisthus masterfully reignites her fear and jealousy (244 f., 253–259, 260 f., 275–277) and reactivates the adulteress.²⁵ This is manipulation and remote control of her fractured self by her *socius pericli*. The unusual bipartite structure of Act 2 (108–225, 226–309) itself reflects Clytemnestra's fluctuating passion (cf. Aygon 2004: 344–352), recalling the shape of Medea's monologue.

Thyestes, too, experiences sharp self-division, but unlike Medea or Clytemnestra cannot localize its source. The surrounding text identifies this as *vetus regni furor* (*Thy.* 302) as against the attractions of exile (446–454), but he himself dwells on the *absence* of apparent causes (429, 434 f., cf. 944, 967): a case of *nescio, sed fieri sentio*. Located darkly in the subconscious, the conflict is not abstracted but is described through its physical symptoms: by gesture and a rhetoric of counter-volition that depicts mind and body acting out of sync.²⁶ Here, if anywhere, the label “akratic” is appropriate. The countervailing pulls are externalized as discordant physical impulses: *moveo nolentem gradum* (420), *placet ire, pigris membra sed genibus labant, / alioque quam quo nitor abductus feror* (436 f.), the emblematic marine simile (438 f.), and finally capitulation that replicates Tantalus's yielding to the Fury (*ego vos sequor, non duco*: 489 ≈ 100). We see this again in the monody of Act 5. Thyestes strives to discard his “philosophical” persona (*veterem* [...] *Thyesten*: 938), but the new role of carefree banqueter will not sit comfortably either: he still experiences spontaneous *dolor*, discordant reflexes (*imber vultu nolente cadit*: 950), natural inclinations thwarted by unidentified terror (*nolo infelix, sed vagus intra / terror oberrat*: 965 f.), and uncooperative hands inhibiting pleasure (*nolunt manus / parere*: 985 f.). The emphasis on counter-volition captures the failure of his own injunction *teque eripe* (428) and his progressive ensnarement by Atreus (*quod*

²⁴ As Oedipus “exonerates” himself by accusing Creon (*Oed.* 668–708). A pointed inconsistency captures the illogical logic of Clytemnestra's self-justification: rousing herself to action, she first envisages herself as vindictive *noverca* (*Ag.* 118 f.), then claims to be shielding her children from the *furens noverca* Cassandra (198 f.). The point is lost if lines 198b–199a are deleted (Zwierlein).

²⁵ Adultery and a resulting sense of guilt, first hinted at in 117 f., are successively disclosed as Clytemnestra's principal motivations for murdering Agamemnon—*pace* commentators who prioritize the sacrifice of Iphigenia: see Tarrant 1976: 205; Mader 1988.

²⁶ Cf. *Med.* 937, 952; *Phaedr.* 602 f., 636 f., 1119 f.

nolunt, velint).²⁷ The victim's self-division is masterfully controlled from outside himself.

Phaedra's psychic turmoil (*Phaedr.* 177–185, 360–383, 583–586, 637, 698f.) again plays out as conflicting identities (wife, stepmother, lover), but what stands out here is her purposeful strategy, working with *nomina speciosa*, of making the weaker cause appear the stronger: self and others are re-designated to support her designs. First, the elaborate transvestite motif externalizes the wish to abandon palace for woodlands and Hippolytus (387–403; cf. *Thy.* 936f., 954–956). Then, in Act 2, role names are adjusted to mask illicit passion. Ambiguity and euphemism mark her style (639f., 858).²⁸ She dismisses Hippolytus's designation of herself as *mater* (608) for the less assuming *soror* or *famula* (611f.)²⁹—which leads seamlessly to the slavery of love (*omne servitium feram*: 612–616) and betrays her true intentions. Equally tricky in negotiating her status vis-à-vis Hippolytus is the title “wife,” tacitly disavowed when she terms herself *vidua* (“husbandless”: 623). And when her cryptic profession of love (640–644) is mistaken by Hippolytus as love for Theseus (645), *amor Thesei* is sophistically twisted into “love for the youthful Theseus” (646f.), a role then readily transferred to Hippolytus (655f.). Phaedra's self-division, consciously rhetoricized as self-justification, exhibits the same analytical clarity noted before.

1.5. *Self as Spectacle*

The grand criminals perform histrionically to an audience, consciously staging *nefas* as spectacle: “Diese Menschen spielen sich selbst wie eine Rolle” (“These people play themselves like a part,” Seeck 1978: 413). *Non in occulto tibi est / perdenda virtus; approba populo manum* says Medea (*Med.* 976f.), for her performance would have been squandered without Jason as spectator (992–994, 1016). Similarly, Atreus would coerce the unwilling gods to watch, but must content himself with tormenting Thyestes through disclosure of the murdered victims (*Thy.* 264f., 893–895, 1067f.). In addition, Atreus and Medea play to an extratextual “audience.” *Age anime*,

²⁷ Tarrant 1985: 121 (ad *Thy.* 212); Rose 1987: 122–125, 127; Mader 1998. Thyestes's loss of self-control is balanced by Atreus's masterful self-restraint (Mader 2002: 337–342; Aygon 2004: 101–104).

²⁸ Her *perplexa verba* grotesquely distort the tradition of amatory euphemism (*Phaedr.* 597; cf. *Lucr.* 4.1160–1170; *Ov. ars* 2.257–262). The elegiac complexion at 613–616 (cf. *Hor. carm.* 2.6.1–4; *Prop.* 1.6.1–4) reinforces that connection.

²⁹ Braden (1970: 19) aptly remarks that this passage “comes close to being the politest speech in the whole Senecan dramatic corpus, and it is a trap.”

fac quod nulla posteritas probet, / sed nulla taceat (*Thy.* 192 f., cf. 753 f.) says Atreus, anticipating his own paradigmatic literary status. Medea speaks the same metatheatrical language: *paria narrentur tua / repudia thalamis* (*Med.* 52 f.); *faciet hic faciet dies / quod nullus umquam taceat* (423 f.); *numquam excidemus* (562). And beyond predicting her literary celebrity, she self-reflexively calls attention to the process of her own construction, reenacting a grand pre-scripted identity in her eponymous drama (*Medea superest—Medea fiam—Medea nunc sum*).³⁰ *Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona*: as their own *praecones sceleris*, the artist-criminals take obsession with self and auto-exemplarity to a new level by transmuting and inscribing their *nefas* in literary memory.³¹

For Oedipus, too, there's no business like show business. As the king-turned-scapegoat and *saeculi crimen* (*Oed.* 875) stumbles darkly out of Thebes, exporting the pestilence with him, he is the self-conscious center of cosmic attention (975 f., 1042–1046, 1052–1061). Then, in *Phoenissae*, craving death at the Sphinx's crag and imagining himself, now *monstrum maius*, as usurping that creature's place, he envisions his grand final performance: putting his *own* life's riddle to a vast audience encompassing Thebes, Sparta, Elis, Parnassus, and Boeotia (*quisquis—quisquis—quique—adverte mentem: Phoen.* 118–139). And, like Atreus and Medea, but with less gusto, he coerces himself to relate his monumental *nefas* for posterity (264–269), thus claiming his own place among literature's great abominations (270–273). This marks the apex of the self-fashioning tendency introduced earlier when he had included himself in the muster-roll of legendary Theban offenders (12–38). Finally, Oedipus himself later takes the role of voyeur (or rather auditor) at the impending duel between his sons (358–362), thereby endorsing that encounter as a paradigmatic clash of titans. For “spectacle” is a literary device to showcase and enhance the monumental (e.g., *Tro.* 1068–1164). Seneca's self-proclaiming and “media”-conscious characters, stars in their own show, rise above glitzy publicity, symmetrically inverting the model of the philosopher “performing” before a rapt audience (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].2.7–12).

³⁰ On *Medea* and *Thyestes* as self-proclaiming tragedies, see Liebermann 1974: 162: “Medea ist eine gegebene Größe; ihre Taten sind Projektionen dessen, was der Begriff ‘Medea’ beinhaltet”; Tarrant 1985: 95 (ad *Thy.* 53); Gill 1987: 31 f.; Fitch and McElduff 2002: 25–27; Littlewood 2004: 175–194; Boyle 2006: 208–218. In *Medea's* case, additionally, sliding-scale propriety in relation to successive life stages recalls the *aetas/aptum* schema in *Hor. ars* 153–178: this perspective too would draw attention to her literary “constructedness.”

³¹ Commentators miss the irony in Creon's *nulla famae memoria* (*Med.* 268): *memoria famae* is the essence of *Medea's* self-construction.

1.6. *Self-Sufficiency*

At crucial points in the *nefas* cycle, isolated and monomaniacal passion figures paradoxically appropriate the rhetoric of philosophical autarky. Oedipus, plagued by self-doubt, laments the deceptive glitter of kingship *sapientis more* (*Oed.* 6–11; cf. *Tro.* 271 f.; *Thy.* 446–453; *epist.* 94.52–74; Monteleone 1991: 239 f.); in *Phoenissae*, overwhelmed by self-hate and the very antipode of philosophical reason (205–207, 347–354), he proclaims his right to suicide in the language of philosophical kingship: *ius vitae ac necis / meae penes me est. regna deserui libens, / regnum mei retineo* (*Phoen.* 103–105, cf. 151–153; *Thy.* 344–390): only his *motives* distinguish him from the true sage (*Phoen.* 188–199). As do Medea's stichomythic *sententiae*, massively asserting isolation and self-sufficiency (*Med.* 157–176),³² and best captured in 165–167: NVT. *Nihilque superest opibus e tantis tibi. / ME. Medea superest: hic mare et terras vides / ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina.* Unassailable *animus*, self-reliance, contempt for fortune (159, 176, 520, 540): this is the pose of the *sapiens* immune to externals (e.g., *dial.* 2 [= *const.*].5.4–7; *epist.* 9.18 f.)—only that here it is *ultimum scelus* that confers inviolability.³³ The analogy extends further. Medea's *ira, qua ducis, sequor* (953) symmetrically inverts the Stoic's obedience to divine λόγος ἡγεμονικός (ἄγου δὲ μ', ὦ Ζεῦ: SVF 1.527), and her exit in a winged chariot, suggesting a paradoxical apotheosis in a godless world (1025–1027; cf. *Thy.* 1110–1112), ironically recalls the godlike status of the *sapiens* (e.g., *epist.* 41.1; 59.14).³⁴ At such moments, spectacular criminality parades as the mirror image of Stoic self-sufficiency.³⁵ Atreus takes the calculus of inversion to its limits, in the exchange with his satellite first spurning “normal” notions of kingship (*Thy.* 204–218), then with the unflinching poise of a *sapiens* intimidating the gods (*movere cunctos monstra, sed solus sibi / immotus Atreus constat, atque ultro deos / terret minantes*: 703–705), routing them (888, 892–895), and triumphantly usurping their place (*aequalis astris gradior et cunctos super / altum superbo vertice attingens polum*: 885 f.;

³² Littlewood (2004: 42) remarks that “stichomythic exchanges are an ideal form for the refusal to communicate”—which applies equally to the passion figures (*Med.* 157–176; *Ag.* 145–159; *Thy.* 204–220) and to vatic, “Stoic” Cassandra (*Ag.* 791–799). Cf. Seidensticker 1969: 41 f., 190–199; Braden 1970: 19 f.

³³ For the “liberating” effect of *scelus ultimum*, see Calder 1983: 188–195 and 1998: 78 f.

³⁴ On Medea as inverted *sapiens*, see Lefèvre 1997a: 77 f. and 2002: 108 f.; Mazzoli 1997b: 101; and for the pattern of inversion, see Picone 1986–1987.

³⁵ Analogously, see Oedipus's “triumphal” exit: embracing his Delphic identity in a pervertedly heroic gesture, he attains a transcendental self-sufficiency of sorts (*Oed.* 973–977). Cf. Liebermann 1974: 46; Mader 1995: 316–318.

o me caelitem excelsissimum: 911).³⁶ And consistently with the inverted self-apotheosis, his ambiguous exchanges with Thyestes take on a distinctive apocalyptic complexion (*discutiam tibi / tenebras*, 896–897)—signaling both megalomania and total mastery of the situation, and producing a paradoxical *coincidentia oppositorum* (Mader 2003).

2. TRUTH AS THERAPY: THE RHETORIC OF RATIONALITY

Emotion does not conduce to sane judgment (*Tro.* 545 f.); the passion figures' massive self-absorption confounds *verum* and *vanum* (*Oed.* 204; *Ag.* 203–225) and forecloses them to true self-knowledge. As the tragedies' most philosophical chorus reflects, in reference to Seneca's most hyperbolic creation, *illi mors gravis incubat / qui, notus nimis omnibus, / ignotus moritur sibi* (*Thy.* 401–403)—this a voice of “therapeutic” reason that reclaims perspective by looking to stable criteria as alternatives to the mad world of *furor*. Several strains in this countervailing register may be identified.

First, choral meditations on popular-philosophical themes create a perceptible counterpoise to the world of passion and power—an inward-looking rhetoric of moderation, a plain man's *quae petenda quaeque fugienda*, the vernacular equivalent to philosophical teaching with topical wisdom articulated typically in the gnomic style. The relationship of chorus to context is seldom straightforward, but in a few cases, at least, *tutus locus*, *media via*, and ataraxic *obscura quies* appear as desirable alternatives to expansive, self-destructing passion (*Herc. f.* 194–201; *Phaedr.* 1123–1140; *Oed.* 882–910; *Ag.* 90–107; *Thy.* 344–403; *Herc. O.* 644–699).³⁷

Next, there are interventions by subordinates (*nutrix*, *satelles*), contrastive foils whose rhetoric of restraint serves both as reality check to a superior's frenzy (until the subordinate is herself cowed into collusion) and as incipient philosophical “commentary.”³⁸ Nurses urge control and moderation (*iras comprime*: *Med.* 381, 425; *Phaedr.* 131, 141, 165, 255 f., 263; *Ag.* 203 f., 224 f.; *Herc. O.* 275–277), invoke titles to remind protagonists of roles and obligations (*regina Danaum et inclitum Ledaee genus*: *Ag.* 125, 155, 203; *Phaedr.* 129, 216;

³⁶ On Atreus as “god,” see Lefèvre 1997b: 65–68; 2002: 107 f. Contrast “Stoic” Thyestes's earlier credo, *non ture colimur nec meae excluso love / ornantur arae* (*Thy.* 463 f.).

³⁷ On the philosophical themes, see Cattin 1963: 19–25; Gil Arroyo 1979: 90–175; and Davis 1993: 125–183.

³⁸ On *domina-nutrix* scenes, see *Med.* 150–175, 380–430; *Phaedr.* 129–273; *Ag.* 108–225; *Thy.* 176–335; *Herc. O.* 233–568; with Hansen 1934: 2–6; Herington 1966: 453–455; Petrone 1984: 22–27.

Herc. O. 277), and confront delusion with realism (*quanta temptes cogita: Ag.* 203–225; *Phaedr.* 195–217; *Herc. O.* 314–330). Occasionally, the restraint figures sound decidedly like “Stoic advisers”: thus Phaedra’s nurse, whose counsels have a philosophical ring (e.g., *Phaedr.* 132–135, 162–164, 249); thus also Atreus’s attendant, parrying tyrannical maxims with political wisdom from *De clementia* and pointing to an alternative model of kingship.³⁹ The natural extension of this type-scene is the appearance, in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia* (437–592), of “Seneca” himself as Stoic foil to the tyrant Nero.

Occasionally, restraint figures are more significant characters whose rhetoric has a distinct Stoic complexion. Jocasta, attempting to calm Oedipus, urges him to play the king, profiled according to the *constantia* ideal (*Oed.* 81–86, with Töchterle 1994: 199–201; *Phoen.* 188–192; *Hor. carm.* 3.3.1–8)—thereby providing an external reference point to measure Oedipus’s subsequent performance (and her own).⁴⁰ And as Oedipus becomes increasingly paranoid, Creon’s indifference to high station (671–693) splendidly highlights the paradox of power: under perceived threat, the tyrant embraces the very kingship he would earlier have relinquished (6–27; cf. *Ag.* 73; *Xen. Hier.* 7.11 f.). Creon’s sane interventions attempt to correct Oedipus’s confusion of *vera* and *vana* (204, 699–702) and reconnect him with reality (cf. *Ag.* 203–225). Finally, Antigone’s opposition to Oedipus’s *libido moriendi* in *Phoenissae* is of special interest, since he himself had earlier justified his suicidal urge by a philosophically sounding appeal to *regnum*-as-autarky (*Phoen.* 98–105, 151–153; cf. *Ag.* 589–591; *Thy.* 365–368). In her counterthrust (188–199) she re-designates his death wish as affective impulse (*victum malis / dare terga* and *timere vitam*; cf. *Oed.* 81–86; *epist.* 24.25) and answers Oedipus’s conception of *regnum* with a “Stoic” *malis ingentibus obstaré*.⁴¹ For Oedipus’s sufferings have made him immune to suffering—whence *libido moriendi* itself becomes superfluous (193–199).

Nor is Antigone’s “Stoic” insight unique. The omega point of suffering as a psychically emancipating experience (*cui deo nullo est opus: Phoen.* 195; *cuius haut ultra mala / exire possunt, in loco tuto est situs: 198 f.*) is the freedom of those who have nothing left to lose,⁴² proclaimed also by “Stoic”

³⁹ E.g., *Thy.* 213, 215–217; *clem.* 1.11.4; with Lefèvre 1985b: 1266–1269; Rose 1987: 118 f.; Mader 1998: 34–49; Manuwald 2002.

⁴⁰ Paradoxically Oedipus, in Act 5, approaches this ideal (*supra*, n. 35), even as Jocasta fails on her own criteria.

⁴¹ Cf. Eckert 1951: 78–82; Busch 1961: 139 f.

⁴² See Calder 1976a: 32–35; 1976b: 10 f.; 1998: 77.

Cassandra (*Ag.* 695–698, 1004–1011), the Trojan captives (*Ag.* 604–610) and Phaedra's nurse (*Phaedr.* 138f.) and akin to the sage's own inviolability (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].4.12f.; 2 [= *const.*].5.6f.; *epist.* 9.18f.; *Cic. parad.* 8f.). This rhetoric of autarky is the positive counterpart to the passion figures' delusional self-sufficiency.

Finally, competing value systems as *rhetorical issue* are thematized most fully in *Thyestes*, where the title character, sobered by exile, articulates his new wisdom through the "revisionist" rhetoric of Stoic paradox—a "precision talk" that reclaims "truth" by deconstructing popular illusions, realigning word and referent from a Stoic perspective that assigns absolute value only to *mens bona* and ranks all else as indifferent.⁴³ Where *vulgus* and *virtus* read their diametrical meanings into words, the *verum/vanum* issue becomes a matter of semantic revaluation, as in *Hor. carm.* 2.2.17–21: *redditum Cyri solio Phrahaten / dissidens plebi numero beatorum / eximit virtus, populumque falsis / dedocet uti / vocibus* (also *non possidentem multa vocaveris / recte beatum*: 4.9.45f.).⁴⁴ This *falsis dedocere uti vocibus* could stand as motto for the rationalist or "dissident" style of *Thyestes exul* (*mihi crede, falsis magna nominibus placent, / frustra timentur dura*: *Thy.* 446f.), who punctures conventional notions as *falsae opiniones* and applies the rhetoric of paradox to reclaim the "true" meaning of words. Describing the outer life in terms of the inner values produces such provocative formulations as *modo inter illa, quae putant cuncti aspera, / fortis fui laetusque* (417f.); *esse iam miserum iuvat* (427); and *expertus loquor: / malam bonae praeferre fortunam licet* (453f.): that is, the negative evaluatives (*miserum, durum*) turn out to be misnomers, since the deprivations they conventionally designate are—for the philosopher—not really wretched at all (cf. *Val. Max.* 4.4 pr.). Conversely, *Thyestes* warns against the seductive glitter (*clarus nitor, falsus fulgor*) of kingship as popularly conceived (414f.; cf. *Oed.* 6f.) and locates true *regnum* instead in the self-sufficient mind—*immane regnum est posse sine regno pati* (470; cf. *Hor. carm.* 2.2.21–24, 3.16.28)—his version of the Stoic paradox

⁴³ So, emblematically, *SVF* 3.595; *Sen. dial.* 2 (= *const.*).14.4: *quis enim nescit nihil ex his, quae creduntur mala aut bona, ita videri sapienti ut omnibus? non respicit, quid homines turpe iudicent aut miserum, non ita qua populus, sed ut sidera contrarium mundo iter intendunt, ita hic adversus opinionem omnium vadit*. See also Seidensticker 1969: 105–107; Lefèvre 1970: 72–74; Mader 1982; 1993; 2000: 164–166; Monteleone 1989: 142–157; 1991: 232–243; Moretti 1995: 159–189.

⁴⁴ Trillitzsch (1962: 42) aptly speaks of "die entwertende Darstellung, die in der Populärphilosophie gebräuchlich war. Man betrachtet eine Sache, z.B. den Tod, von einem ganz ungewöhnlichen, neuen Standpunkt aus und entkleidet ihn seines falschen Scheins; die veränderte Sicht reißt ihm gleichsam die schreckende Maske vom Gesicht." See also Rabbow 1954: 42.

that only the sage is a true king, complementing also the second chorus's interpretation of *regnum* and autarky (344–390, esp. *rex est qui metuet nihil, / rex est qui cupiet nihil: hoc regnum sibi quisque dat*).⁴⁵ Thyestes fails egregiously to heed his own advice, even as Atreus finally attains a perverse sort of autarky. But as *rhetorical* mode, this “revisionist” style transgresses conventional usage (τὴν προσήκουσαν χρῆσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων: SVF 3.595) as much as the tyrant's expansive “newspeak”—only in the opposite direction.

In 1808, August Wilhelm Schlegel adjudged that Senecan drama was to high tragedy “wie eine hohle Hyperbel gegen die innigste Wahrheit” (“as hollow hyperbole to profoundest truth”, Schlegel 1966: 234); in 1927, T.S. Eliot famously opined that Seneca's characters “all seem to speak with the same voice, and at the top of it; they recite in turn” (Eliot 1963: 68). But their self-conscious *Schreirhetorik* is preposterous only by standards foreign to Seneca himself—for the correlation *qualis homo, talis et oratio* is itself a sliding variable. Located in the contemporary literary-intellectual context, the rhetoric of irrationality is typically the signature of figures struggling to make themselves heard in the postclassical universe; dichotomously the rhetoric of rationality, often converging with Stoic thought, represents an effort at “normalization” and an attempt to reclaim moral bearings in this disjointed cosmos. In the end, the two styles answer each other in paradoxical symmetry.

⁴⁵ Cf. Cic. *Mur.* 61; Hor. *sat.* 1.3.124 f.; *carm.* 2.2.21 (with the commentators); Gil Arroyo 1979: 79–83, 164–167.

CHARACTERS*

G.W.M. Harrison

Three ways of analyzing characters in Seneca's plays have consistently produced results.¹ First, Seneca's characters have been and can be compared to characters in Greek plays when an earlier version of the play exists. This approach makes apparent immediately what parts of Seneca's plays are not derived from Greek exemplars. The characters in Seneca can also be examined as types across the plays, looking for common construction and use, such as messengers, attendants, minor roles, protagonists, and antagonists. A third approach is to examine individual questions about characters and characterization and determine to what extent they are valid across the plays and, more importantly, the extent to which they add to our knowledge of plays individually and to Seneca's achievement as a whole.

GREEK PRECEDENTS

All of the standard critical editions of Seneca's plays and standard translations of either individual plays or groups of plays comment on what the modern scholar sees as the relationship of the play to an earlier Greek version, if such survives. The first half of the twentieth century saw little originality in Seneca, and less of interest,² but the direction of scholarship since Tarrant's

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¹ Only eight of the Latin tragedies to survive from antiquity were written by Seneca. This article follows convention in including *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus* in discussion of Seneca's plays. It also accepts, with reservation, the dating of Fitch 1981 and Nisbet 1990 discussed, *supra*, pp. 37–41: AD 49/51 *Phaedra*; AD 51/52 *Medea*; by AD 54 *Hercules furens* and *Trojan Women*; pre-AD 59 *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus*; around AD 62 *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*. An emerging consensus (Ferri 2003a, Littlewood 2004, Harrison 2003 and 2009) assigns both *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus* to the reign of Domitian, but proponents of a Vespasianic date remain (Boyle 2008: xiii–xvi). Nisbet 1987: 247–251 and Harrison 1999: 127 f. have defended or contemplated composition by Seneca.

² Eliot's attitude toward Seneca informed the generations he embraced: see, e.g., Eliot's introduction to the 1927 re-issue of Thomas Newton's 1581 *Seneca, his tenne tragedies, translated into English* (London, A.A. Knopf), quoted in Tietze 1987: 36 as well as his March 18, 1927 address

Agamemnon (1976) has been to stress the *Romanitas* of the plays, that is, the ways in which the plays reflect Roman material culture and values, and comment upon Roman politics and political institutions.³ Studies on sources for the plays increasingly look to other Latin plays, as does Littlewood (*supra*, pp. 515–520) on *Hercules Oetaeus* vis-à-vis *Hercules furens* or Torre (*supra*, pp. 501–511) on Seneca's *Thyestes* and the lost *Thyestes* of Accius, or Corsaro (1978–1979) on *Agamemnon*; to the epic, as does Fantham (1975) on Dido in Seneca's plays or Schiesaro (1992) on echoes of Virgil in *Thyestes*; to Latin satire, such as reminiscences from Seneca's parody of the apotheosis of Claudius in *Trojan Women* and *Hercules furens* (Nisbet 1990: 96), or comedy (Fantham 1982 on *Seneca's Troades*); and even to Ovid's *Heroides*, love letters from abandoned women, such as Medea (Liebermann, *supra*, pp. 459–474), Phaedra (Mayer, *supra*, pp. 475–482), and Deianira (Littlewood, *supra*, pp. 515–520).⁴

Medea is often considered the masterpiece of Seneca's earlier plays,⁵ and his version bears as little resemblance to Euripides's *Medea* as does *Hercules Oetaeus* to Sophocles's *Trachiniae*.⁶ Seneca opens with Medea delivering the prologue, defining her character.⁷ Her first words are addressed to the goddesses of marriage, who should have protected the sanctity of her marriage. She curses Jason to wandering in misery, demands death for his intended bride and all her family; nowhere does she consider killing their children. In Euripides, the prologue is spoken by Medea's close retainer. Medea's entrance is accompanied almost immediately by a desire to kill their children to spite Jason. The acrimonious exchanges that conclude both plays again show how different Seneca's vision is in its characterization of

to the Shakespeare Association (London), "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" (printed by H. Milford, Oxford). His view remained unchanged in his *Essays on Elizabethan Drama* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956); cp. Segal 1983: 172 f. for a more conciliatory view of Eliot.

³ Historical references are the basis of Nisbet's dating (1990) of the plays as opposed to metrics (Fitch 1981) or the development of the chorus (Mazzoli 1996).

⁴ Aside from plot and characterization from drama, epic, and satire, Seneca wrote also in the tradition of Alexandrian learning, using puns and false etymology to convey meaning (Ahl 2000: 153–155 and Stevens 2002) and the complexity of his metrics looks for comparison with Horace (Nisbet 1990: 98).

⁵ It is worth remembering that *Phaedra* and *Medea* are the two earliest *surviving* plays. They are both the mature products of a playwright in control of his craft.

⁶ On sources in *Medea*, see Liebermann, *supra*, p. 473; for *Hercules Oetaeus*, see Littlewood, *supra*, pp. 518 f.

⁷ What follows is based largely upon Liebermann, *supra*, pp. 459–474. He is most astute that Medea's sense of what she has earned (*merita*) makes her growing isolation more acrimonious. Although known as sailors, Greeks were and are notoriously afraid of the sea, which gives emphasis to her claim (352) that she will be an evil worse than the sea.

Medea and Jason, and the different values of Greek and Roman society. In Euripides, both children die off stage following normal Greek stage practice; the spectacle of the Roman stage would have allowed for the death of at least one, if not both, of the children on stage. The Roman love for progression in horror found separating the two deaths far more compelling than the Greek version. Even more telling is Medea's refusal to cede the dead bodies to Jason in the Greek version, while for the Romans to have to bury the bodies, tend their graves, and perform the annual rituals for the dead would have made the memory of their deaths more unbearable to Jason. Seneca and the classical Greek dramatists⁸ are separated by five centuries and a sea, as well as a language, and so it is not surprising that Medea should be simultaneously recognizable but so different.

Regarding *Medea*, Liebermann (*supra*, p. 464) has stated that "[t]he question primarily is not who is right or wrong, but who wins." The same is true for *Thyestes*, *Phoenissae*, and *Agamemnon*. Seneca's *Agamemnon* departs boldly from Aeschylus's achievement.⁹ Aeschylus's visually stunning prologue of the watchman seeing the bonfire signal, and realizing that Troy has been burnt, is replaced by the ghost of Thyestes, Agamemnon's uncle, bent on revenge against his brother (Agamemnon's father).¹⁰ The openings change the color of the two plays: one opens on hope and the other on darkness. The rest of the action follows from these first differences. Aeschylus's Clytemnestra, upon hearing of her husband's imminent return, recalls Agamemnon's role in the sacrifice of their daughter; in Seneca she dwells upon her adultery with Agamemnon's cousin. This almost certainly reflects the devastating political consequences of adulteries of imperial wives and female family members within Seneca's lifetime, including the pretext for his own exile in AD 41. The heralds' speeches are also worlds apart: in Aeschylus, the

⁸ New plays continued to be written for Greek dramatic festivals, but nothing can be calculated on any effect they might have had on Seneca. Such a potential, however, cannot be ignored. Revivals of Greek and Latin comedy, tragedy, and satyr play are also well attested, such as an *Alcestis* pointed at married women. These are part of the cultural background, whose influence also cannot be determined; cp. Turner 1963 on new plays written and performed in Roman Egypt, and on Seneca's *Medea* in the fourth century AD (Markus 1997).

⁹ Although Kugelmeier (*supra*, pp. 493–500) does not have a dedicated section on sources, he does remark the differences in his text. Stackmann 1950 is still the place to start for a comparison of Aeschylus and Seneca. Tarrant 1976 is concise, while Marcucci 1996, Riemer 1997, and Theodorakis 2001 offer full studies.

¹⁰ The obvious comparison is the ghost of Tantalus, which opens *Thyestes*, but that play imitates the opening of *Agamemnon*, and not the other way around. Ghosts were far more ubiquitous in drama (tragedy, comedy, and satyr drama) than the few that have survived; cp. Bardel 2005.

herald recounts the horror of their suffering at Troy and the suffering that followed, dwelling upon the death of Ajax from Salamis, an island visible from Athens; in Seneca, the messenger Eurybates has one of the longest messenger speeches in drama (421–578), in which the departure from Troy is given in great detail. It sets the scene (Kugelmeier, *supra*, pp. 459 f.) for Agamemnon's return, making Ajax's hubris a metaphor for his own, but it also makes Clytemnestra's coldness apparent, since she inquires after other Greeks but never the sufferings of her own husband.

Agamemnon has two choruses,¹¹ one consisting of the wives of citizens, who counsel Clytemnestra and are present on stage from line 57, and sing the first (57–107), second (310–388), and fourth (808–866) choral odes. Clytemnestra introduces (585–588) a chorus of captive Trojan women, which then sings the third choral ode (589–658). Following their ode, the chorus, sometimes represented by their leader (*choregos*), interacts with Cassandra in a series of lyric meters (659–781) until Agamemnon appears. The chorus of Argive women, however, states the theme of the play—*fortuna*, as often in Seneca—and their ode in praise of Hercules (808–866), if only peripherally related to the action, nonetheless draws the lesson of Hercules's own death, which was set in motion by his wife's reaction to his new mistress. The implied, flattering comparison to Agamemnon marks his hubris as the earlier reference to Ajax had done.

TYPES AND INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Agamemnon,¹² Thyestes and Atreus,¹³ and Medea¹⁴ all rush to embrace their fates. The first fifty-five lines of the *Medea* open with her prayer to deities charged with defending marriage and the production of legitimate children.

¹¹ Seneca perhaps already had a double chorus in *Trojan Women* (see Stroh, *supra*, pp. 435–447). *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus* use the double chorus to great effect.

¹² In spite of the fact that Agamemnon is on stage only in lines 782–807, all action in the play revolves around him or is caused by him. When he does speak it is only to Cassandra, not his wife; see Motto and Clark 1983.

¹³ For characters and characterization in *Thyestes*, see Torre, *supra*, pp. 504–508, Littlewood 1997: esp. 58 f. and 65 f., and Schiesaro 2003. Atreus hardly needs the provocation of Tantalus's ghost, which contrasts with how Agrippina, seen in a dream, unsettles Poppaea in *Octavia*.

¹⁴ See Liebermann (*supra*, pp. 459–466) for the development of the character and *furor* of Medea. Also informative is Schiesaro 1997b on Medea (91–93) and Oedipus (93–98). Oedipus in *Phoenissae* is much more aggressive in seeking to spur on the fratricides of his sons than Tantalus in *Thyestes*.

To modern sensibilities, she is the aggrieved party and she uses the sheer number of the deities she implores to impute merit to her plea. In Seneca, however, no characters or situations are straightforward. Medea, although she is in the right, acts so horribly that she forfeits sympathy to Jason, who is clearly in the wrong. The stridency of her appeal and her language, which is almost out of control in its hissing sounds and repetitions, show that she is beyond logic, beyond reason, beyond compromise or compassion. Her call is not for justice but vengeance and she would summon to the task deities such as the Furies, known for their implacability. Her one lucid thought feeds the insanity: she realizes that Jason alive would suffer more as a disdained wanderer, an inversion of Oedipus, who preferred exile to returning to Thebes in *Phoenissae*.

Medea's story was well loved by Roman audiences,¹⁵ and so Seneca's concern was to position *his* Medea for the audience. She fixates on her humiliation and on Jason's upcoming marriage to a much younger, and non-foreign, bride; as a divorced "barbarian," or "outsider," social ostracism throughout Greece and separation from her children is certain. "Birth" is the word that comes to mind repeatedly, and tortures her every thought.¹⁶ Her wish for Jason is that his children resemble equally both parents. In her frenzy it is unclear whether she means the two sons he has had by her or any children that he might have wanted by his intended bride. Nor does she elaborate on whether the resemblance she has in mind is physical or moral. She declares instead that revenge has been born, meaning "an idea for getting even," but Medea treats the notion as if it were flesh and blood.¹⁷ The rest of her prologue gives specifics: she intends to burn all of Corinth and its vicinity on the day of the wedding, killing everyone, including Jason's bride and new father-in-law.

Seneca's prologues successfully convey character. Similarly, titles either name the composition of the chorus (in the Greek style), or are meant to channel the audience's reception of who or what is meant to be the fulcrum of the play. Stroh (*supra*, p. 435, 1994, and 2008) and Harrison (2013) have made a thoroughly convincing case that *Troas* (i.e., "a poem on Troy") was

¹⁵ Ovid, for example, visited the myth in his *Heroides*, *Metamorphoses*, and his lost play, *Medea*. Seneca's nephew, Lucan, also wrote a *Medea*.

¹⁶ On the importance of her royal lineage to Medea, see also Liebermann, *supra*, p. 463.

¹⁷ Children of incest could be purposely born as instruments of revenge; Aegisthus in *Agamemnon*, child of Thyestes who had eaten his children (Seneca's *Thyestes*) is one prominent example, so Medea's claim would have mystified the audience as it was doubtless intended to do.

the title of the play that has conventionally come down as *Troades*, or *Trojan Women*. An analogue case is *Phoenissae*, which in the A MSS is entitled *Thebais* (see Frank, *supra*, p. 449). *Phoenissae* is not possible, since there is no reason to believe that the play had or would have had a chorus of Phoenician (i.e., Levantine) women. *Phoenissae* would emphasize the non-Greekness of Thebes, which is unlikely to be the focus of the play; rather, Seneca had firmly in mind the five failed dynasties of founding families of Thebes and so Thebes by its title becomes a metaphor for Rome. Accius's play presumably centered on Atreus, hence its title, while Seneca's play, by its title *Thyestes*, seems to ask the audience to reflect upon the other brother.¹⁸

Phaedra and *Hippolytus* both come down as titles of Seneca's play (Mayer, *supra*, p. 481), but the greater authority of *Phaedra* also asserts her as the center of attention over Euripides's *Hippolytus*. It was Phaedra, wife of Theseus, daughter of the king of Crete, sister of Ariadne, who had been abandoned by Theseus years earlier. She is stepmother to Hippolytus, Theseus's son by the queen of the Amazons and when Theseus's absence drags on, her loneliness fastens on her ward. The play is named for *Phaedra* but the prologue, in which Seneca emphasized the portrait of Hippolytus popularized from myth, belongs to Hippolytus.¹⁹ From what the audience learns in his first speech, it later comes as little surprise that Hippolytus rejects the advances of his stepmother, since he is not even interested in the camaraderie of his hunting companions. Rather than hunt together, he sends them off individually to different districts of the Athenian countryside. He commands—imperatives are the most frequent verbs in his monologue—they to go to the most remote parts, away from where the other hunters had been. Hippolytus has revealed all that the audience needs to know about him, and has not earned their sympathy.

Rather than follow the monologue with the first choral ode, Seneca introduced Phaedra so that their characters and motivations could be compared

¹⁸ Torre (*supra*, p. 505) has little to say about the implications of the change in title but cites instead Picone 1984.

¹⁹ See Mayer (*supra*, p. 479) who cites sympathetic analyses of Hippolytus by Hine 2004 and Littlewood 2004. My own view is that Seneca is instead trying to establish for the audience that Hippolytus's rigidity and overreaction contribute significantly to his ruin. He is so much an "outsider" that his prologue is the only one in Seneca not in iambic trimeters; the only other exception is *Octavia*, whose prologue is in the same meter. Sacerdoti 2008: 287 has noted that Hippolytus' catalogue is "epic"; it would seem as if Hippolytus is being positioned as a character in a tragedy who would rather be elsewhere.

immediately one after another.²⁰ Where Hippolytus is straightforward and commanding, Phaedra is allusive and discursive. Hippolytus is untroubled by thinking or aware of his subconscious. Phaedra is not indecisive; rather, at one level she is desperate to transfer responsibility for her feelings, while simultaneously suppressing what she feels. If Hippolytus is entirely self-revealed, Seneca wisely held back some of Phaedra's psyche: we know what she wants and how she intends to fight against it. What we do not know is what she is capable of, and this is what makes her character compelling. Several times she will be faced with alternatives that could derail the inevitable tragedy, but each time she makes the wrong decision, and each time from different emotional motivations.

In her first speech, Phaedra²¹ reveals that she is very aware how much she must atone for her family's lurid sexual past, yet she is infuriated by the unfairness of her husband's behavior. She bristles that she has married well beneath herself;²² in her view the seapower of her native Crete should have earned her a much better match. It will still be fresh in the audience's ears that the seeming sum of Hippolytus's knowledge of Crete is of their spirited hunting dogs (33). Phaedra complains that Theseus is always absent and never faithful, and she is aware that he has gone down to the underworld to help his companion kidnap Hades's wife as a capture-bride.²³ She somehow knows that Theseus and Pirithoüs have been apprehended and are chained in the underworld. In her mind, this somehow exculpates her from her letting her attention wander to her stepson.²⁴ But she cannot, at least initially, admit her desire directly, so she resorts to periphrasis: she finds herself incapable of performing the expected women's work and the religious duties

²⁰ In what follows, I rely heavily on the psychological interpretation of the opening scenes of *Phaedra* in Segal 1983: 181f. and Roisman 2000: 73–83.

²¹ Much has been done on the character of Phaedra: see Mayer, *supra*, pp. 478f., in which he singles out with approval contributions by Mayer 2002, Fitch and McElduff 2002, Littlewood 2004, Armstrong 2006, Gill 2006, and Wray [forthcoming].

²² In Roman dynastic politics, agreements and treaties were often sealed with a marriage. The inference in Phaedra's statement is that her marriage followed upon diplomacy between Crete and Theseus's Athens. The Roman audience would not have been unaware that marriage to Octavia solidified Nero's claim to the succession.

²³ Unstated but known to the audience is that Pirithoüs and Theseus agreed to help each other abduct a famous woman. Theseus's choice was Helen, later Helen of Troy, at that time about 12 years old. Plutarch's *Life of Theseus* is a near contemporary source for the events related in Seneca's play.

²⁴ It was not necessary to state to the audience that as a foreign bride, like Medea, Phaedra's position is entirely dependent upon her spouse. With Theseus gone, and Hippolytus ascended to the throne, he would have been her only hope of status and survival.

apportioned to women, that is, the rites and labor associated with Athena, patron deity of Athens. She protests a preference for Artemis, virgin goddess of the woodlands, for chasing animals in the forests, and hurling spears. She considers her mother, Pasiphaë, happy to have consummated her passion for a bull and wishes that Daedalus, the master architect, could help her as he helped her mother. For Phaedra, blame must go where blame is deserved: she is a descendent of the Sun (Phoebus Apollo), hated by Venus, goddess of Love, who will stop at nothing to bring misery to his family. Phaedra's tragedy will travel, one stop to another, to its inevitable wreck, with each crisis more horrible than the one that preceded it. She will admit her desire to her nurse, she will try to seduce her stepson, she will lay a false accusation of rape, she will be silent at his destruction.

There can be no redemption for the characters in Seneca's plays because they are not interested in any. Tantalus on stage *explains* Atreus and Thyestes; he does not *exculpate* them. Throughout the ancient Mediterranean, and most especially for Greeks, Egyptians, and Romans, whose literatures and myths are most fully known, it took several generations to expiate a curse or remove a blot. In their societies, families for several generations or even in perpetuity could be disqualified from public service, military commands, or religious office because of the actions of a single member of the family in a position of prominence. Atreus and Thyestes will be held accountable for what they do, as will their descendants, but they must also continue to atone for Tantalus by their own suffering. Their insatiable thirst is for power and revenge, and in the case of Atreus, for humiliation. He cannot just serve up his nephews as a stew to Thyestes. His need to humiliate is so great that he must watch Thyestes eat and then tell him what has happened.²⁵

All of Atreus's being is consumed by having been cuckolded by his brother Thyestes. He cannot trust that his children are his own and it was not satisfaction enough to have prevailed in attaining the crown of Argos and sending his brother into exile. The extent of his fixation is shown not so much by the cannibalistic feast he devises as by his incomprehensible assumption that if Agamemnon and Menelaus help him butcher and cook the sons of Thyestes it will prove their legitimacy, since sons could not do something like that to their own father.²⁶ Nothing matters to Atreus other than avenging this insult as horribly as circumstances will allow. Atreus makes the single correct

²⁵ For this, see esp. Segal 1983: 183–187.

²⁶ Fitch and McElduff 2002: 26–28 comment on how Atreus and Thyestes play out a family history that will be continued.

assumption that Thyestes will deceive himself at the prospect of a return to luxury. The regal authority Atreus pretends to be willing to share with him and which Thyestes's own sons pine to inherit does not interest Thyestes. All he wants is to trade in his rags for fine dress, strikingly illustrated when he comes on stage in tatters to be received by Atreus in robes of state, and exchange penury for prosperity. Thyestes's elegant dress in the banquet scene underscores the irony of his eating his sons cubed on skewers and cooked in stew: what he has gained temporarily on the surface cannot compare with what he has lost forever. The presentation of the garnished heads of his three sons on a platter penetrates Thyestes's wine-induced haze but does not surprise him. He had always harbored some suspicions; his years of exile and stingy hospitality from others had made him wary. It was, as Atreus guessed, pressure from his sons that overcame Thyestes's wariness. The play ends with Thyestes saying, "Avenging deities will come. They deliver my prayers that you be punished for this." Atreus gloats: "I deliver you to your sons for punishment."

Family resemblances emerge that enrich the characterizations. Agamemnon should remind the audience of Atreus in bearing and gesture. The play begins with the ghost of Thyestes followed by the chorus of Argive women. Clytemnestra and her attendant then occupy the stage, and are joined by Aegisthus. A messenger, Eurybates, gives a long account of the fall of Troy and return to Greece. All is in readiness for Agamemnon's triumphal entry. But first the chorus of captive Trojan women with Cassandra at their head is ushered on stage for the audience and the other chorus to gawk at. Finally, at line 782, Agamemnon enters his own play. "Finally" is his first word; it is nearly his last since he speaks only 21.5 lines in the play named for him. But concerns about him and his personality dominate the dialogue between Clytemnestra and her attendant, and then between the two of them and Aegisthus, in which they consider what they must do because of what they can expect from Agamemnon. Agamemnon's contemptuous, self-congratulatory bombast does not disappoint: his first utterance is on his personal safety, an unintentional irony. In his view it is for his homeland that he sacked Troy and brought home booty. Never does he greet his wife or family, but trades barbs instead with Cassandra.

Aegisthus, like his father, has an affair with the wife of a family member that brings ruin to all; like his father, Thyestes, he lives in someone else's house by sufferance, and had spent years in exile. Other surface similarities could be added, but they are of little value in defining his character. Cassandra, priestess, prophet, and mistress of Agamemnon, sizes him up instantly: *semivir*, he is half a man. The Latin is used in two ways and both are

appropriate to Aegisthus. He is half-man and half-beast because of his incestuous genesis, but he is also dominated by Clytemnestra and swept on by events rather than orchestrating them.²⁷ Thyestes also was tentative when he should have been forceful; everything in *Thyestes* happens at Atreus's instigation and according to his timing. The situation of Aegisthus is little different. He urges Clytemnestra toward regicide, largely through rhetorical questions, rather than directing and revealing a well-formed plan. Clytemnestra's sense of his lack of decisiveness pushes her toward reconciliation with Agamemnon, assuming that her adulteries and her husband's infidelities would cancel each other out and peace could be restored to the household. Aegisthus is appalled that she could think this possible. Agamemnon would forgive himself but not her, and his years of dictatorial leadership over the Greeks will make him insupportable at home. Aegisthus stumbles again in the murder scene: he stabs Agamemnon first but he does so in the side and not in the chest as a warrior should. The slashing wounds from Aegisthus are not fatal. Clytemnestra takes a two-headed axe on a long pole and hacks into Agamemnon eventually severing his head and several limbs. What decided Clytemnestra on slaughter when she was wavering toward acceptance is never revealed. She ends the play as she started: an adulterer afraid for her life and in dread of her closest relatives.

The functional purpose of the Greek chorus initially was to distract the audience during scene changes. Their odes were meant to be songs remembered and sung long after the performance, and the tunes (i.e., choral meters) varied as much as the melodies of current music. Seneca does follow Greek practice in some of his plays: in *Oedipus*, for example, a choral ode is inserted to mark the passage of time. It is introduced by Teiresias (402), the prophet, who says, "while we peer into the closed places of the underworld, let there be a catchy (*populare*) song in praise of Bacchus." Sometimes the shift of scene marks two acts taking place at the same time such as in *Hercules furens* and *Thyestes* (Shelton 1975). Theatre design in the Roman Empire, however, often diverged from earlier Greek design, and the size and configuration of spaces for plays shows an exceptional variety (Sear 2006 and Izenour 1992). It is, therefore, impossible to predict scene and set changes in imperial plays, and there is evidence that orchestras were converted for hunts (Harrison 2000b) or water ballet (Coleman 1993), making it likely that in

²⁷ This accords well with the view of Kugelmeier (*supra*, pp. 497 f.), in which Aegisthus is summoned by and spoken to by Clytemnestra (986); Kugelmeier, however, sees him growing into a tyrant in his sharp exchanges with Electra at the end of the play.

some productions the chorus was either on stage or dispensed with entirely. Consideration of the Senecan chorus in what follows, therefore, can have applied to only certain times and places, and associates Senecan practice too closely with that of his remote Greek precursors. The chorus in Seneca's plays has attracted considerable attention recently from scholars.²⁸

Marshall (2000) is among those scholars who wrestle with choral entrances and exits during the play, and who question whether the chorus remained on stage. If it did remain on stage, it would have been privy to all of the dialogue and thus in the best position to comment on the action. That the chorus is often more hopeful than correct, such as in *Thyestes* and *Octavia*, means that it has been moved to a corner and thus might not have heard everything, or if it did, chose to hear only what it wished.²⁹ Its presence did make it possible for the chorus to interact with characters on stage, either as a unit or through their leader, the *choregus*. The interaction can be conducted in the choral melody: Hecuba in *Troas*, for example, sings the same dirge tune as the chorus, insinuating herself into the chorus as a full partner in their sufferings;³⁰ Helen, who also lost a Trojan spouse, continues to speak in the recitative meter of monologues and dialogues, emphasizing the social and emotional distance between her and the chorus.

In contrast, the chorus's entrance in *Octavia* is problematic, since Octavia herself had been speaking in iambic dimeters, as had Hippolytus in *Phaedra*.³¹ The chorus in *Octavia* and elsewhere sometimes adopts the spoken rhythms of the other characters and thereby enters the play as a character. When it does so, it can and does impel the action of the play rather than merely comment upon it. In *Oedipus*, the chorus, or perhaps the chorus represented by its leader, the choragus, is a character on stage with Oedipus and Jocasta in the final scene.

If the prologue sets the scene, the chorus sets the tone; that is, while the prologue establishes the "facts" of the drama, the chorus puts them in perspective, and lends its sympathy or support to one character or point of view. In *Troas*, the chorus is constituted of captive women representing

²⁸ One thinks immediately of the papers on the Senecan chorus edited by Castagna 1996, such as Aricò (131–145), Caviglia (87–103), and Mazzoli (3–16). Also of value are Calder 1975, Davis 1993, and Hill 2000.

²⁹ So-called Senecan "choral semi-omniscience" is discussed by Harrison [forthcoming]; cf. Marshall 2000 and Volk 2006.

³⁰ Stroh, *supra*, p. 437.

³¹ Even when the chorus enters is a matter of debate: Harrison 2003 opts for line 201, while Ferri 2003a and Boyle 2008 prefer the traditional line 273.

different age groups. Even so, they speak with a unified purpose and singular viewpoint. Their four extended odes show them to be numb, going through the motions of grieving by rote; questioning the existence of the soul,³² and its utility; dreading their new homes in a hostile land in which they will be novelties at best; and latching upon grief as the only form of comfort open to them. The Greeks are shown to be more barbaric than their captives. This is a persistent feature of even classical Greek drama, but they would have engaged the sympathy of a Roman audience even more since the Romans pretended to believe that their race sprang from Trojan refugees who escaped the Greeks. The chorus to *Thyestes* (Torre, *supra*, pp. 506–508) might operate in a similar manner. In one view, it can be imagined as in the wings or peering onto the stage for the opening scene between the Fury and Tantalus, since it seems aware of what has taken place. Its dread could possibly be intuition but its rehearsal of the impious past and capabilities of this family is more compelling if it is grounded in prescience of what will take place. In the chorus's second appearance (336–403), it either willfully misinterprets Atreus or its desire for a reconciliation makes it believe that the quarrel between Atreus and Thyestes has been resolved. The chorus is lulled further into self-deception (546–622) by the meeting between Atreus and Thyestes; it sees what it wishes to and ignores the irony and ambiguity of Atreus's words. This increases its anguish (789–884) when the truth in all its horror is finally revealed. The chorus does not reflect the arc of the action so much as it charts an optimism destined to be smashed.

The chorus in *Oedipus* is a perfect barometer to the action (Töchterle, *supra*, esp. p. 486). In its parodos, it laments the present plague at Thebes, giving example after example of the deaths of humans and animals. Its central ode (709–763) is on the unlucky history of Thebes, which supplied more than its share of mortals to suffer at the hands of the gods. It is placed in the text just at the point where Oedipus realizes that something, as yet unrevealed, is terribly amiss. The announcement of the death of Polybus, his presumed father in Corinth, makes him consider leaving Thebes. Just as Oedipus learns the truth, the chorus reflects on what kind of life it would choose: a modest, unruffled existence that brings no attention is the perfect contrast to the action on stage. Its final song repeats a word used by Oedipus himself—fate. If what is fated is unavoidable, what responsibility does man bear?

³² In another view, if Stroh (see n. 11, *supra*) is right, the second ode is sung by Greek soldiers.

The chorus tries to exculpate Oedipus, but sometimes it is openly hostile to the character for whom the play is named. Medea, in rage and anguish, delivers the prologue in front of her quarters. No sooner is she done than the chorus of Corinthian men walks across the stage praising the coming wedding of Jason to Creusa and showing relief that he has escaped a woman who cannot be harnessed.³³ As they file past, Medea tells her nurse the hymn she has heard and its meaning. Medea then has a long interview with King Creon, in which she begs for a last day with her children, whom she must leave behind. The chorus reappears, singing about sea travel and the trouble it has brought to men, mentioning Medea by name. It is likely that Medea hears this slur, since she is on stage for the following scene as well as the prior one.³⁴ The chorus overhears Medea deciding what poisons and caustics to infuse in a garment for Creusa, which leads it to the general reflection that no natural disaster can match the fury of a woman and that all heroes come to a bad end. The ode ends by hoping that Jason will fare better. Once the garment is made, she uses her sons to deliver it to Creusa. The chorus is powerless to stop Medea or warn Creusa: its questions in the following song are rhetorical or exasperated, rather than genuine. It has a clear intuition of what she is capable of doing to Creon and Creusa. The chorus of Corinthians is loyal to its king and princess. Jason, even if the chorus supports him instead of Medea, is still an interloper and so it is not present and does not comment on the murders of Jason's sons.

None of the main characters in *Phaedra* is sympathetic (Mayer, *supra*, pp. 478f.): Theseus, the king, is largely absent; Phaedra is a foreigner; and Hippolytus is consumed by his love of hunting, oblivious to his responsibilities. The positioning of the chorus of Athenians reflects this—its odes consider broad topics and, with one exception, only obliquely address the plot. When it does, its assessment is not favorable to anyone. Its first lines, for example, complain about Cupid's cruelty.³⁵ To the chorus, he is no god of love but a calculating *agent provocateur* of degrading sex. It chooses its examples from deities and the animal kingdom. Its third appearance fills the space between Theseus's condemnation of Hippolytus and the report of his death

³³ The word chosen for Jason's marriage to Medea is that for breaking a spirited horse by placing a bridle on it. On Medea and the chorus, see esp. Hine 1989.

³⁴ The nurse's first sentence is sometimes taken to mean that Medea is rushing onto the stage, but the Latin is not a word for "coming" or "entering"; rather, "pacing" should be understood.

³⁵ This finds a parallel later in *Octavia* in which the pro-Octavia chorus complains about Cupid but the pro-Poppaea chorus celebrates him.

and considers the devastating effects of random caprice (*fortuna*/fortune), the subject also of its last song (1122–1155). The chorus remains on stage after the final ode to help Theseus collect the scattered pieces of Hippolytus and witness with him Phaedra's suicide.

In between (736–834), is a magnificent examination of the curse of beauty and its brevity. As a mark of its agitation and confusion, the chorus wanders between general statements and specific observations on Hippolytus's rejection of Phaedra's advances. It finds them both guilty and guiltless. The chorus does not always sing in unison and is not always unified. Hippolytus has an unblemished reputation and traditional values and his beauty is compared to the stars and the moon. His looks are compared favorably to Apollo's and Bacchus's, but this reminds the chorus that Phaedra's sister, Ariadne, is Bacchus's consort. The beauty of gods is immortal, but humans are like the first spring flowers that fade quickly. While beauty lasts, use it. There is no place to exhibit or hide beauty that can preserve it. Young men who were chased by goddesses and gods because of their beauty could not defeat mortality. The chorus, however, seems to know that Phaedra will accuse Hippolytus unjustly and returns to holding him blameless and accusing her of crime.

Agamemnon has a double chorus, a feature imitated and expanded in *Octavia* and later in *Hercules Oetaeus*.³⁶ In *Agamemnon*, a chorus of women citizens enters the stage after the prologue and sings about the deceptiveness of fortune in ignorance that coming events will show how right they are. They sit quietly on stage while Clytemnestra speaks first to her nurse and then to Aegisthus. They must hear at least the final exchange between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in which she is waspish about his incestuous birth, which Aegisthus asserts happened at Apollo's instigation. The second choral ode starts with praise of Apollo,³⁷ and continues with praise of other Olympic deities. The power of deities causes them to dwell on the powerlessness of mortals, but the entry of the Greek herald cuts them off. Eurybates is followed by the chorus of Trojan women. They are living proof of the capriciousness of fortune, and could thus excite the sympathy of the Greek chorus. Their ode describes the fall of Troy, and after exchanges with Cassandra, they question how she could have spurned Apollo. The chorus of Greek women returns and starts to compare Agamemnon favorably to Hercules (808–866). Their ode is cut off by the sounds of Agamemnon's murder.

³⁶ For another opinion, cf. Stroh, cited nn. 11 and 32.

³⁷ It is as likely that they did not hear Aegisthus, whom they could hardly be expected to approve, and the mention of Apollo is then unintentionally sarcastic.

The choruses in *Octavia* are partisan, one favoring Octavia and the other advocating the claim of Poppaea. The pro-Octavia chorus decides to riot—a decision taken in one of their odes (669–689)—and so, by the conventions of the day, must have been a male chorus and probably conceived of as in their 40s or 50s. The recurring theme of the odes is caring for one's reputation (*fama*)—examples cited include Agrippina, mother of Nero, who will appear later in the play, and famous or notorious women and men from Roman history. The last two odes are delivered after Praetorian troops quell the riot. Their clothes are described as torn and burnt. They add fortune to reputation as important for gaining and maintaining prominence in the state. Their message is consistent: a good reputation deserves good fortune. Sex with Jupiter made his lovers famous (another meaning of *fama*)—this is the simple equation for Poppaea's supporters; the inference is that power is sexy and Poppaea is thus within her rights to sleep with the most powerful man possible. To the pro-Poppaea chorus, in their second ode, Cupid, god of love, always wins. If people accept his power, he wins; if not, he still wins, but is vicious and sadistic in addition. The two choruses are a perfect synergy of underscoring the themes of the play, commenting on the play through mythological and historical examples, and taking part in the action. Poppaea and the chorus of young women prevail, but the old men get the final word: as Octavia sails away they still hope her life can be spared as once Iphigenia escaped certain death, but they know better because "Rome exults in cruelty to citizens."

The universal translation of "nurse" from *nutrix* can be made with more precision, since this character is never a medical assistant in the modern understanding of the term and the women they attend no longer require a wet nurse. Sometimes the character is a nanny, that is, a family retainer who had been with the female lead from birth, as in the case of Octavia and Phaedra. In both instances, the nurse claims a moral authority based on having supervised the character from birth and both times mentions her nursing breasts prominently in expectation that this will bring the character to obedience. In *Phaedra*, other terms are also used to establish the nurse's advanced age.

In other cases, the "nurse" can be an attendant who has been in service for many years, but who was not necessarily a nanny from childhood or even a wet nurse. Medea's nurse, for example, seems to have knowledge of Medea's childhood home in Colchis and so it is likely that the audience is meant to believe that she served Medea as a child and now helps take care of her children. Poppaea, in *Octavia*, has a nurse who is intended to contrast with Octavia's nanny in the first half of the play. Poppaea's "nurse" speaks to Poppaea like a peer and shares her opinions; rather than dissuade Poppaea

from a course of action, she confirms Poppaea's instinct that her beauty and sexual charms will ensure she gets her way.

Nurses in plays serve female characters. Their purpose is to dissuade the female character from whatever course of action she is considering, but in the end she capitulates and helps. The nurse in *Octavia* tries to convince Octavia that her nobility will prevail and force Nero to come to his senses. Octavia refuses to be persuaded and remains adamant in her depression at her coming death. Octavia's death is inevitable and her acceptance of her fate can be paralleled only by Polyxena in *Troas*. Normally, Medea or Phaedra or Clytemnestra or Deianira comes up with a deadly or sacrilegious plan and enlists the nurse's help or at the very least seeks her confirmation. Generally, one speech discloses the plan or intention, the nurse replies in horror in a set speech, and then there is a rapid exchange in which each side tries to convince the other. Ultimately, the nurse capitulates. This is what happens when Phaedra makes known her passion for Hippolytus. The nurse reviews the long history of aberrant romances in her family and delivers a diatribe against love as overrated and perpetually destructive.³⁸

Octavia sees that the effect of Agrippina's marriage to Claudius was to remove Britannicus from the succession, to disinherit him in essence. This is what Medea fears most. Her initial decision is to murder Creusa and Creon, king of Corinth, whom she blames most; the deaths of her two sons are intended to punish Jason. Deianira's rant is primarily over the prospect that Iol   will give Hercules a son. She need not mention her fear that the new son would replace the elder—the ancient audience would have automatically inferred that. She did not think that the cloak she sent to Hercules would kill; she was under the mistaken impression that it was an aphrodisiac that would return his affections to her. Instead it kills him, and someone is needed to announce his death.

The purpose of the messenger is to move the action of the play forward quickly, and to describe events that have taken place off stage.³⁹ Messengers are rarely delineated as individuals, although two messengers are named: Eurybates in *Agamemnon* and Talthybius in *Troas*, doubtless because they are state heralds in official dress, Cassandra in *Agamemnon*, Theseus in

³⁸ On the role of nurses, see Mayer, *supra*, p. 475 (*Phaedra*) and Liebermann, *supra*, pp. 462 f. (*Medea*).

³⁹ That the messenger speech is essentially a bridging device is demonstrated by Slavitt's attempt to splice in extra scenes to fill out the disjointed remains of Seneca's *Thebais/Phoenissae*. In the style of Tony Harrison's *Tracker's*, Slavitt added characters that were not in the original, but he also added more messenger speeches.

Hercules furens, and Philoctetes in *Hercules Oetaeus* fulfill the function often assigned to messengers. Messengers deliver information to the main characters, but more frequently to the chorus. Characters enter into dialogue with messengers as often as the chorus; the distinction seems to be one of social status—messengers who speak to royals are more likely to be named and of high rank themselves.

Not all messenger speeches are successful: the speech of the *nuntius* in *Phoenissae* is only eight lines long (320–328). He does not convey information about an off-stage action to Oedipus, but responds to Oedipus's feelings of guilt; his role is more that of a retainer (*famulus*). Later in the play, a messenger identified as a *satelles*, to distinguish him from the *nuntius*, addresses Jocasta (387–402). This messenger gives information about the battle lines that are being drawn up, and urges her to act while something can still be done. The messenger in *Medea* (879–890) informs the chorus that King Creon and his daughter, Jason's intended bride, have been killed and that the city of Corinth is on fire. He sprints on and off the stage in only a handful of lines. The messenger in *Octavia* also stays on stage for only one exchange (780–805). He discloses his errand to the pro-Poppaea chorus: he is running from the palace to the *Castra praetoria* to raise a general alarm, because the pro-Octavia faction is rioting and engaging in arson. The audience would be largely left to infer from his remarks that he is a soldier unless he were dressed in a military uniform.

The messenger speeches in *Oedipus* are much more successful. In the first, a messenger from Corinth, specified in the text as a *senex Corinthius*, announces the death of Polybus, whom Oedipus had believed was his father, and is interrogated by Oedipus (784–844). The messenger reveals that Oedipus was a foundling, raising Oedipus's suspicions. A search finds the shepherd Phorbas, who tells Oedipus the truth of his birth. The chorus announces (911–914) a family retainer (they call him *famulus*) coming out of the palace. He repeats (915–979) in direct speech Oedipus's railings against himself and his self-blinding, all of which prepares the chorus and the audience for Oedipus's reappearance on stage. The apparent distress of the retainer is remarked by the chorus. Sometimes the messenger himself indicates his mental state.

A retainer (*satelles*) in *Thyestes* fulfills the same function as the nurse in *Phaedra* and *Octavia*. He tries to discover (204–335) what Atreus is planning and then tries to dissuade him. The messenger (623–788) is a far more convincing role: several times he asks the chorus for a moment to compose himself before revealing what he has just seen. Even then, he cannot bring himself to describe the horrors and so he gives an extended description of

first the public areas of the palace and then the private spaces. He forestalls the inevitable by even naming some of the woods used in the construction of beams and trusses. This takes him to a place filled with gruesome trophies collected over several generations of the family, including several small altars. This is the room to which Atreus brought his three nephews. The messenger can finally say what he saw, but even then he needs several promptings from the chorus.

Messengers often also mark shifts in the action and the way in which they are dressed can be a sign of the new direction the play will take (392–588; Kugelmeier, *supra*, pp. 495 f.). *Agamemnon* requires that Eurybates's official dress be salt-encrusted from his voyage from Troy and that he be festooned in celebration of his successful return. The discord in his garment emphasizes the dramatic situation, as does his speech. Instead of being about the glorious conquest of Troy, it is about the storm on their return in which many more Greeks died. In his view it would have been better if they had died heroes' deaths at Troy, foreshadowing the murder of Agamemnon, which Cassandra has seen in a vision. As a prophet, she need not have been witness to the regicide to know that it occurred. Seneca's Cassandra, after the destruction of Troy, has been freed of the curse that caused her not to be believed. In her initial appearance on stage, her fragmented and incoherent vision is easy to dismiss as ranting (659–774), but Agamemnon understands her too well in their sniping at each other, and her vision of his murder is accepted as true (782–807). Dressed in foreign clothes she would have been exotic, which would have added to the irony, as she is well aware, of Agamemnon's death: a Trojan captive, she announces the murder of the leader of the Greeks.

Messenger speeches can also be interrupted by voices and noises off stage. In *Hercules furens*, some action is required on stage while Hercules rushes off to kill Lycus, the impostor who had tried to force marriage on Megara, Hercules's wife. Amphitryon, father of Hercules, asks politely about what the underworld was like. Theseus complies graciously, yet at the beginning of his account he states that Lycus is about to be killed (*dabit*: 643), and then immediately that Lycus is killed already (*dabit* [...] *dat* [...] *dedit*: 644). Like Eurybates in the *Agamemnon*, one would have expected that Theseus would have talked about his own exploit and his rescue by Hercules. Instead, Theseus gives a vision of the topography of the underworld⁴⁰ that is clearly

⁴⁰ Billerbeck (*supra*, p. 431) is correct to see this as a form of ekphrasis imported from epic into tragedy.

meant to adjust that of Virgil in *Aeneid VI*. This cannot be an accident, since Aeneas, the Trojan survivor and precursor of Rome, was given a guided tour by the Sibyl in which the fiery pit was skirted quickly and Elysian fields with purified souls ready for reincarnation was the centerpiece. Theseus's Hell is darker: much is made of Hades's appearance sitting on his throne in the innermost chamber and little of Elysium. Aeneas exits with a prediction of Rome's future greatness; Theseus recalls Hercules's clubbing Cerberus into submission and the almost uncontrolled panic of Cerberus when seeing the light.

Theseus presents the longest messenger speech in a Latin play; that of Philoctetes in *Hercules Oetaeus* is the second longest (1609–757) and prepares for the epiphany of Hercules that concludes the play. It is needed to explain why and how Philoctetes comes to own Hercules's bow, and, typical of messenger speeches, it fills the audience in on the action that took place off stage, here, the death of Hercules. Hercules's embrace of his death finds its parallel in Seneca's *Trojan Women*. When a command is being issued, a herald is dispatched in all his official regalia, so it is Talthybius who informs the chorus that a demand has been made that Polyxena must become the bride of Achilles (163–202; interrupted once by the chorus). Since Achilles is dead, her sacrifice is required, and so the tone Talthybius takes is sympathetic and respectful. By contrast, near the end of the play an unnamed messenger relates (1064–164) to Andromache and Hecuba the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena. To their questions, he assures them that the son of Hector and Andromache died nobly. Astyanax did not wait to be tossed from the tower but threw himself down. He dashed on the rocks with such force that there were not enough remains to collect. Polyxena, daughter of Hecuba, stood quietly and looked straight at Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, as the sword was plunged down her throat. She fell modestly and did not utter a sound. The report of their deaths resolves the central conflict of the play, as does Philoctetes's speech in *Hercules Oetaeus*. Favorable winds for sailing rise, and the curtain comes down.

The three ghosts in Latin drama would not be as compelling if the objects of their haunting were not present. Agrippina, in *Octavia*, gives such a detailed account of how she wishes to discomfort Poppaea that it would be visually appealing to have Poppaea on her bed writhing in anguish while, possibly, Nero slept undisturbed next to her.⁴¹ Normally, silent characters are soldiers or

⁴¹ This would imply that *Octavia* has two successive scenes, or what Shelton 1975 sees as problems of time in *Hercules furens* and *Thyestes*.

attendants of one of the main characters. In two instances, they are children who are not entirely mute. The children in *Thyestes* need to be on stage to amplify the horror. Astyanax in *Troas* utters two words, "pity me," to his mother as he is dragged off to his death. On the whole, silent characters can use body language or gesture to reinforce stage action or to undercut what is being said or asserted; the same is true of the chorus when it remains on stage after it has sung its ode. It can show shock, horror, disgust, agreement, and support, but equally disdain, incredulity, and distrust. No evidence survives from the texts themselves or from commentaries on Latin drama, however, so it is not possible to calculate how silent characters might have been used.

Senecan characters reflect types found in Greek tragedy and other Roman tragedy, because the audience expected that there would be kings, queens, seers, messengers, attendants, and hangers-on on stage. Within each group, however, Seneca probed complex psyches and personality conflicts that were dysfunctional in distinct ways. If it can be said (as it should be) of Plato that each of his dialogues looked at a different philosophical issue, and if it can be said (as it should be) of Plutarch that each of his *Lives* centered on a different virtue or vice, then it can be said that each of Seneca's plays examines a different ethical problem and moral dilemma. The response of the characters to the situations in which they find themselves is individual, yet plausible. Because Latin plays most often used themes from Greek myth, modern readers tend to approach Seneca's plays from Greek, not Roman, sensibilities. Surviving Greek tragedy, however, was deeply grounded in the politics of Athens after the Persian Wars and during the Peloponnesian Wars. The first six of Seneca's plays, if the conventional dating is correct, are colored by the palace intrigue that took place in the first half of Claudius's reign, including Seneca's exile to Corsica, while *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* reflect the miasma of Nero's slide into absolutism. All of these conditions contributed to the design of Seneca's characters, but also raise questions about his relationship to his own creations.

Seneca was, is, and will be endearing and enduring, because we all live in a drama of tragic proportions, or, at least in our darkest moments, we like to think we do. Seneca's genius was to draw characters that were similar to their equivalents in Greek drama. They also reflected the characterization of specific roles, be it Agamemnon, Medea, Theseus, or whomever, in Roman performative traditions, and also on vase paintings, mosaics, frescos, sculptures, and other art. He created characters that are recognizable in these other manifestations, but added to and reshaped them so that they became his own. His characters appealed to Romans because they were definably Roman, and were, either by accident or intention, suggestive of prominent

persons in current court politics. Unbeknownst to him, his characters are also elastic enough so that each generation can pin to them the personalities of the famous and infamous of their own times. Since the Renaissance, performance of Greek drama has overshadowed Latin tragedy. From the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, a deserved balance has begun to be redressed.

THEMES*

G.W.M. Harrison

It is informative to approach themes in Seneca's plays through two pieces of influential scholarship: Pratt's 1983 book, *Seneca's Drama*, and Boyle's 1997 book, *Tragic Seneca*. The former considers that Seneca's plays were motivated primarily by his devotion to the philosophical creed of Stoicism; performance on stage thus becomes less important than circulation among an influential readership. For the latter, performance is never questioned as the goal of composition, and the complex motivations of the characters on stage turn Seneca's theatre into one of myriad ideas working simultaneously at multiple levels.¹ Obviously the differences in their points of view, however simplified here, greatly affect what are seen as the major themes recurring across Seneca's plays.² Segal (1986: 3), in his psychological critique of the plays, noted that when Seneca took over the moral conflicts from the homogeneous world of Athenian drama he transformed them for a heterogeneous, polyglot Roman audience using the rich Roman dramatic vocabulary for examining morbid states of mind. In so doing, Seneca changed the focus from conflict with the gods or social norms to that of "the isolation of an individual soul [...] trapped in the hell of its own torments" (Segal 1986: 4).

The stories and characters of his plays are interrelated: there are two Oedipus plays (*Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*); Trojan women form a chorus in two plays (*Agamemnon* and *Trojan Women*); Theseus is in two plays (*Phaedra* and *Hercules furens*); Agamemnon is a minor character in the mythologically anterior *Thyestes* and the largely absent protagonist in *Agamemnon*. Medea comes to Athens after the action of *Medea* and is stepmother to Theseus, agent of his own son's death in *Phaedra*; Jason's reputation in *Medea* is based

* Thanks are owed to my research assistant, Allison Williams, for her help on my two contributions.

¹ An earlier distillation of Boyle's position is found in Boyle 2008, recently revisited by Harrison [forthcoming].

² For the inclusion of *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus* and the dating of the plays, see Harrison, *supra*, p. 593, n. 1.

on securing the Golden Fleece, the pelt of a magical ram, while a different *aries arcanus* is the object of contention in *Thyestes*.³ Deadly cloaks figure in *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, and *Hercules Oetaeus*; the non-Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus* complements and echoes Seneca's *Hercules furens*. Although each play can and should be enjoyed and understood on its own, the plots are so intertwined that an interpretation of the plays depends in part upon one another, what Boyle has called a "palimpsestic code of intertextuality."⁴

This chapter cannot claim to record all of the themes in Seneca's plays—partially because there are so many and partially because each generation of readers finds its own themes in his plays⁵—nor can it show how individual themes work in each and every play. One would expect, as is the tradition of surviving Greek tragedy and Roman comedy, the prologue to most often announce the themes of the play, which are typically then recapitulated by the chorus on its entry. Successive choral odes tend to comment upon the preceding scene and often look back at preceding odes.⁶ Senecan

³ See Littlewood (1997: 62–64), who believes that the ram's importance is as a metaphor for how Atreus reduces Thyestes to the level of an animal, which compares well with Paschalis's (1994) vision of animal imagery in *Phaedra*.

⁴ Boyle 1997: 85–111 ("palimpsestic code") and Schiesaro 2003: 221–255 ("intertextuality and its discontents") see some kind of conversation among Seneca's plays, while intertextuality for Littlewood (2004: 259–301, on *Phaedra*) is seen in Seneca's use of his literary precursors, for which see also Littlewood's remarks on *Hercules Oetaeus*, *supra*, pp. 518f. The author of *Hercules Oetaeus* clearly intended his play to be a continuation of *Hercules furens*, and the author of *Octavia* tied understanding and full appreciation of his play to Seneca's *Thyestes*, *Phaedra*, and *De clementia* (Harrison 2003).

⁵ Some other themes noted by scholars: *Stoicism*: Mayer, *supra*, pp. 479f., Billerbeck, *supra*, pp. 428–430, Kugelmeier, *supra*, p. 497, Torre, *supra*, p. 508, Littlewood 1997, Aygon 2008, Tietze Larson 1991, Schiesaro 1997b, Segal 1983; *cosmic disruption*: Boyle 1994: 18–31, Grazia Bajoni 1996: 75–85, Volk 2006, O'Kell 2005; *danger of high position*: Tarrant 1976; *death and dissolution*: Stroh *supra*, p. 436, 440, 447, Kugelmeier, *supra*, pp. 496f., Keulen 2001: 14f., Fantham 1982: 71–75, Boyle 1997: 67–73, Littlewood 2004: 15–25; *four ages of man*: Segal 1983: 229–251, Bauzá 1981: 55–66; *Senecan baroque*: Boyle 1987: 7–14, Goldberg 2000: 209–231; *control of nature*: Davis 1983: 114–127, Boyle 1987: 18–24, Boyle 1997: 60–67; *psychological drama*: Schiesaro 1992, Shelton 1978, Segal 1986; *deception*: Torre, *supra*, p. 503, Hook 2000; *virtue and vice*: Lawall 1983: 6–26, Tietze 1987, Littlewood 2004: 25–36; *children*: Rota 1997: 157–196; *puns on etymology/names*: Fitch and McElduff 2002: 24–32, Frank: 1995a: 121–130, Ahl 2000: 151–172, Stevens 2002: 125–153; *uncertainty and guilt*: Töchterle, *supra*, p. 488, Kugelmeier, *supra*, p. 498, Frank, *supra*, pp. 453f., Fitch and McElduff 2002: 22–24, Fantham 1975: 6, Tietze 1987: 135–141; *exile*: Frank, *supra*, p. 451, Kragelund 1999: 246.

⁶ See Harrison on the chorus as a character in Senecan drama (*supra*, pp. 602–607). Fitch (1987b: 69) has remarked on the high degree of convergence between sense unit and metrical unit in the odes, and concludes that, when contrasted to metrical dissonance in the acts and scenes, choruses do not show internal conflicts to the degree of the

composition at its best, however, is so varied that any attempt to discern patterns will have as many or more exceptions as instances that conform to the rule.⁷

EROS (LOVE) AND ERIS (STRIFE)

“Love,” anthropomorphized as the god “Cupid,” is not a benevolent force in Seneca. Eros’s one notice in *Oedipus* is as a god with two natures (*geminus*: 500): one to make people fall in love and one to prevent them from falling in love.⁸ The second Euripidean version of the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, the one that survives, revolved around the rivalry between Artemis, virgin woodland goddess, and Aphrodite, goddess of love. Venus and her son Cupid have Seneca’s play almost entirely to themselves as elements of divine causation. Mayer (*supra*, pp. 475–477) gives the précis of the action: Phaedra admits her love (218) and her nurse tries to convince Hippolytus (574). When unsuccessful, Phaedra (634) fulminates against the pointless hope of love and lying Cupid. The chorus (273–360) concedes the power of Cupid but sees it as humiliating—it afflicts old men as much as young, and causes even deities to make themselves ridiculous, as seen by Jupiter changing shape, Diana delaying the dawn to swoon over the sleeping Endymion, and Hercules wearing the clothes of Omphale, the queen to whom he was indentured. Once Hippolytus leaves in horror, the chorus (736–834) considers that his behavior will win him lasting fame. But then it thinks of Diana’s unrequited

action. Another interpretation, when front rhyme and front repetition are added, a feature also of later church chants and dirges, is that this is a feature of sung lines, particularly when movement is incorporated. This in turn supports performance as opposed to recitation, about which there can be very little doubt anymore. In contrast, Hirschberg’s 1989 interpretation of *Phoenissae* is based entirely on his assumption that the play was recited, not read (1–4, 8–17); for further confirmation, see Fitch (2004: 263–277) on elision in choral odes. Seneca’s practice of restricting elision to the first syllables of a line in the ode compares favorably with the pattern of trombone slurs in marching music on the first or (less often) fourth beat [personal experience].

⁷ For which see Billerbeck 1988: 101–138. Torre, *supra*, pp. 502 cites Horace (*Ars poetica* 188f.) that a play should have five acts separated by four choral odes. She demonstrates how the first and last choral odes of *Thyestes* comment on one another and how frequently the third ode is a continuation or elaboration of the second ode. On the unity of second and third choral odes, see Töchterle, *supra*, p. 486 on *Oedipus*, Liebermann, *supra*, p. 464 on *Medea*.

⁸ Correspondences to Ovid, himself the author of a play on Medea, are more frequent than to Virgil, and so one thinks immediately of Eros, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, who punished Apollo by making him fall in love with Daphne, but making Daphne reject him.

love for Endymion, and concludes that Hippolytus, in rejecting Phaedra, has made himself even more desirable.

Coffey and Mayer (1990: 5) and Mayer (2002) are correct to see parallels with the Biblical story of Potiphar's wife, but *Phaedra* is more than just the story of a lecherous stepmother. The wicked stepmother is a much more frequent type in the Roman popular imagination, represented most notoriously in Suetonius's depiction of Livia, who removed all rivals so her son could succeed Augustus. Octavia opens the play named for her with a reproach of her stepmother Agrippina, a reproach that is sustained throughout the play by other characters, including Nero, Agrippina's own son. The lecherous stepmother is comparatively rare in Latin literature as is its analogue, the father or stepfather who sexually abuses his young ward or daughter.⁹

The chorus of young women in *Octavia* (806–819; Boyle 2008: 259–261, Ferri 2003a: 355 f.) consider that Eros delights in humiliating gods and men, while they still recognize that he will guarantee the victory of Poppaea, Nero's beautiful mistress, over Octavia, his wife. Seneca and Nero had debated (held a "heated confrontation," Ferri *supra*, p. 522) the political implications of Eros and Venus (538–571) for an emperor. Seneca cannot see how Nero can marry Poppaea without sacrificing the good luck his reign has had so far (563), but for Nero, since lovemaking is natural, the act and the choice of object of affection should not have political consequences. For the young women, sex is frivolous and worth a good sneer: people love talking about the copulations of Jupiter (762–779). He changed into a swan for one woman, a bull for another, a shower of gold for a third, and they are all now constellations. The messenger's news of the riot hardly changes their tone. In their chilling, and ultimately correct, assessment (806–819), Seneca, identified by Poppaea's confidant as their real opponent, does not stand a chance.¹⁰ They do not

⁹ This view of Agrippina in *Octavia* parallels representations of Livia and Agrippina in Suetonius. For another view of Agrippina, see Boyle (2008: 217–220 and 227 f.), who would make her more closely parallel to other ghosts in tragedy. Ferri (2003a: 296 f.) draws parallels between Agrippina and Nero in this play and Clytemnestra's cursing her son Orestes in Seneca's *Agamemnon*. None of these three views are mutually exclusive. Billerbeck (*supra*, p. 430) makes much of Juno as the wicked stepmother in *Hercules furens*, relying on a tradition that goes back to Ovid and Virgil. One might also consider that the portrait of Juno in Seneca contributed to the depiction of Agrippina in *Octavia* as well.

¹⁰ Poppaea's confidant says (696 f.) that "Venus, mother of Cupid, the greatest power [among the gods], has delivered victory to you over Seneca." Modern editions, following a suggestion made in 1921, print *culta sancta* for the impossible manuscript reading of *culpa Seneca*. I would suggest the emendation *ulta Senecam tradidit* since it maintains *ulta* as a

have to wait long. Nero, who sometimes fancied himself Jupiter's avatar,¹¹ unleashed horrible violence in the name of Love.

THE PASSION OF WOMEN

Seneca has given each woman her own disposition, strengths, and flaws, and each one has a different breaking point. Medea, for example, gives herself over entirely to her anger and maintains a high level of frenzy throughout the play. In Costa's view (1973: 8) she comes to exult and revel in her anger, almost tasting blood in a way associated more with male characters in epic and tragedy. More recent scholarship on Medea (Schiesaro 1997b: 91–93, Williams 1992) emphasize her attempt to cling to Jason by holding on to their shared past.¹² It is only after Jason's final rebuff that her passion becomes as insatiable as her love. Tietze (1987: 137) would see in this that Medea (893 ff.), like Phaedra (592 ff.), Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon* (139 ff. and 890 ff.), and Deianira in *Hercules Oetaeus* (307 ff.), needs to steel herself to her criminal purpose. The culminating scene for each is the moment when they surrender to their passion. Once Medea hones her focus, nothing and no one else exists apart from her desire to teach Jason a horrible lesson. With each murder, she has a chance to be sated with carnage, but each only whets her appetite.¹³

Deianira in *Hercules Oetaeus* is motivated more by a sadness bordering on depression: Hercules's new *amour*, Iol  , as a captive has an inferior social position and even when she was a princess, she was the daughter of a lesser king. To her mind no one seems willing to take her side, and it is the prospect of being unavenged in her humiliation that propels her to retrieve the venom-fouled cloak and blinds her temporarily to the probability that the centaur was manipulating her when he said it would stop Hercules from being unfaithful. She leans upon her nurse and the chorus for support and assurance that she is right. The very fact that she feels she needs their validation indicates her own self-doubts.

nominative modifying Venus, who has avenged herself. This also retains the pointed reference to Seneca, who has been conquered (*victim*).

¹¹ Known from an anecdote in Vacca's life of Lucan, once Nero's close friend and later victim.

¹² The claims of kinship are inverted in *Phoenissae*; see Frank, *supra*, p. 455.

¹³ Medea's closest parallel in Seneca is Atreus, with his meticulous bloodthirstiness, whom Gazich 2000 pairs. Atreus's calm attention to detail is unsettling and is matched only by Medea's doling her four murders out over three episodes for greatest effect.

Clytemnestra has the clearest vision of her circumstances: married to an absent king, she has installed her lover in his house, and she is not unaware that Aegisthus is using her for his own ends.¹⁴ She also has the cunning to know that any adultery would disgrace Agamemnon but that one with his cousin would wound deeper. It is, however, the appearance of Cassandra and the realization that Agamemnon has had his own adulteries that enrage her. Cassandra might wear disheveled rags, but she argues with Agamemnon in only the way a spouse or lover does. Clytemnestra's detection of the familiarity between Agamemnon and Cassandra is insulting, particularly since it is so public. Up until that moment, Clytemnestra had considered leaving Aegisthus to his fate and returning to Agamemnon.

These women's passion might seem excited not by desire but by discovering the adulteries of their husbands, as, for example, Juno in *Hercules furens*. Clytemnestra, who is living in adultery herself, decides to kill Agamemnon, her adulterous husband, to save herself. Medea is about to be divorced and exiled with nowhere to go.¹⁵ She opts not to kill her husband, as that would be too easy. Instead she poisons his would-be bride and her father and kills his sons in Jason's sight to increase the horror. Deianira, in a similar circumstance, sends Hercules a robe dipped in centaur's blood, which she had been told "would keep her husband faithful." She sends it, convincing herself only partially that it is a love philter. The cloak, however, is a flesh-eating poison, and "keeps Hercules faithful" by killing him. When the truth about the cloak is revealed, Deianira commits suicide.

RESENTMENT AND REVENGE

The passion of men manifests itself most often in resentment and revenge, the motivators of the action in *Thyestes*, in which brothers were rivals for the same woman and the throne she conferred.¹⁶ The plot of *Thyestes* goes full circle, since Aegisthus in *Agamemnon* commits adultery with Clytemnestra

¹⁴ The chorus (79–81) of *Agamemnon* comments on marital infidelity; see Kugelmeier *supra*, p. 494. Fantham 1975: 8 links the anger of Medea and Clytemnestra to Dido's feelings of abandonment in Virgil.

¹⁵ Frank, *supra*, p. 456 n. 15 notes the humiliation of contracting a foreign marriage. She has in mind Jocasta's sympathy for her exiled son Polynices, but any spouse in a foreign land is without a supporting network of relatives.

¹⁶ Torre, *supra*, pp. 501, 508 f. sees power as the main theme in *Thyestes*, for which see below. Revenge and power often go hand in hand, so Shelton 1975, Fantham 1975: 1, Littlewood 1997, Schiesaro 1997b.

not out of love but to avenge his father, Thyestes, against the more prominent of Atreus's sons. Thyestes, in the prologue to *Agamemnon*, gloats in advance over his revenge:¹⁷ his mind bristles and he tingles with gooseflesh as he leaves the underworld. At line 25 he announces his intention to surpass all the villains in hell in crime. His rivalry with his brother Atreus continues even in the afterworld, since he cannot allow that his brother will have committed a greater crime than he (26). He has reversed the natural order of things (34)¹⁸ for his crime, and Aegisthus will be his agent. Clytemnestra herself seeks revenge for Agamemnon's sacrifice of their daughter, Iphigenia. Her life was less important to him than his ambition to be the hero who sacked Troy.¹⁹ It is thus poetic justice that Agamemnon, who cared so little for family, should be killed at home.²⁰

Revenge is successful in *Thyestes*, although its great price makes it unpalatable, as is doubtless also true for *Medea*. *Agamemnon* is interesting because his death seems fully earned and is quick (as well as off stage). It is in the attitude to their children that Clytemnestra begins to resemble Agamemnon, and the cycle looks to start anew. *Hercules furens* argues for the end of revenge and suggests strongly that it is often unsuccessful and unsatisfying. Juno has been successful at revenging herself on Hercules, and on Jupiter, her philandering husband.²¹ Hercules himself took instantaneous revenge on Lycus, but the revenge, when complete, brings on the onset of his madness. For a third time in the play, revenge is sought, but in his insanity, Hercules thinks it is against Juno and the gods, while instead it has cost him his family.

VIOLENCE

All of the plays center on violence of one sort or another, and the emotional violence is more brutal than the physical. *Phoenissae*, which looks at several

¹⁷ "Gloating" is used also by Segal (1983: 186 f.) to describe the scene of revelation of the cannibalistic feast.

¹⁸ See n. 5 *supra*, but esp. Volk 2006.

¹⁹ Tarrant 1976: 4 f. In the larger tradition of the story, Clytemnestra also wishes vengeance on Agamemnon for murdering her son by her former husband. It is often unclear how much of the myth, outside of what is retold in the play, Seneca expected his audience to recall. Littlewood (1997: 57) has called *Thyestes* "the tragedy with no women," but perhaps it did not need one since Clytemnestra dominates the action in *Agamemnon*.

²⁰ Perspectives on the cause and extent of Agamemnon's guilt are discussed by Kugelmeier, *supra*, pp. 498 f. and Keulen 2001: 13 ff., who is also interested in the cyclic nature of violence in Seneca.

²¹ Billerbeck, *supra*, pp. 429 f. is right to point out that interpretations of *Hercules furens* vary wildly.

manifestations of civic violence, is a case in point. Antigone, the dutiful daughter who loves her father, Oedipus, follows him into exile even after she discovers the horrible truth of her incestuous birth. She leads him to the hills above Thebes in the mistaken belief that he can be prevailed upon to intervene between her two brothers and that a father's word would force them to come to terms. She apparently abandons her father when it becomes clear that Oedipus is in no mood to help. In Fantham's reading of the play, as it survives,²² Oedipus blinded himself to expiate the curse on his family. The enmity between his two sons makes him realize that his self-mutilation was for nothing. In anger he curses his sons to commit even greater outrages than he did, greater than his because his acts were unknowingly trying to avoid pollution,²³ while they will deliberately kill each other, thereby ending the curse by ending the lineage. Part of Oedipus's frustration with Polynices in the *Phoenissae* is that Polynices had been offered a kingdom elsewhere, in a city as opulent, yet he is determined to risk death for Thebes.²⁴ To Polynices, a foreign throne would mean being landless and dependent upon a woman, while Thebes is his birthright. He has justice on his side, since, by their agreement, he was to rule in alternate years with his brother Eteocles.

One view of human existence is that all human activity somehow entails, celebrates, necessitates, or takes pleasure in violence. Even something as benign as an invention or discovery is somehow twisted by humans to serve greed and be used in aggression (Biondi 1984). This is nowhere more apparent than in the second ode (301–379) in *Medea*, in which the chorus regrets the invention of boats.²⁵ When men lived in their own fields there was no crime and everyone lived to old age and was happy. Sailing brought suffering on the seas, and made it possible to sail to foreign lands and covet foreign goods. Sailing was responsible for the quest for the Golden Fleece and for Medea's presence at Corinth.

²² Fantham (1983: 61–76) remains the most sensible treatment of the fragments. The weakness of her argument is to assume that the missing parts of the play would have followed the general outlines of Aeschylus's antecedent, yet no play of Seneca's closely follows prior versions. However, one should now read Frank, *supra*, pp. 449–458 on punishment and violence in *Phoenissae*.

²³ On pollution, see also Frank, *supra*, p. 454.

²⁴ On this point, see esp. the section on "Reception" in Frank, *supra*, pp. 457 f. Seneca's two last plays, *Phoenissae* and *Thyestes*, have brothers fighting over a throne. *Phoenissae* is perhaps more dreadful, because the other brother *had* a throne already.

²⁵ On the metaphorical value of the Argo, see Liebermann, *supra*, pp. 464 f.

Almost all of the plays have more than one death.²⁶ It is almost as if only a single corpse will not suffice, one of Seneca's main attractions for the Spanish and Elizabethan Theatre of Blood (Goldberg 2000: 209–232). Fitch (1987a: 24–35) has noticed that Hercules, in *Hercules furens*, kills one family (an extended political one of Lycus) when sane and one family (his own) when insane. His own words and the words others use to describe his actions are very much the same, whether he is sane or insane. He must constantly avenge slights, real or perceived, and administer punishment. The clarion call to violence rings so loudly that he even postpones greeting his wife and father to murder the opposition.

RIVALRY, JEALOUSY, FAMILY HATRED

What feeds civil war and intra-family violence are rivalry, jealousy, and family hatred, which animate most of the plays in one form or another. The rivalry between Achilles and Agamemnon, and Achilles's hatred of Troy in *Trojan Women* continues even in the grave. Priam, king of Troy, was survived by two daughters, and when the dead Achilles demands Polyxena as his sacrifice bride, Agamemnon is left with Cassandra as his prize, the ranting prophetess cursed not to be believed. Cassandra will be central to Agamemnon's murder upon his return to Mycenae.

Sibling rivalry is shown at its darkest in *Phoenissae*.²⁷ Eteocles had refused to relinquish the throne he had agreed to share in alternate years with his brother, and Polynices, in response, besieged the city. Their enmity is so bitter and all-consuming that they agree to engage in single combat, in which they fatally wound each other. In the parts of the play that survive, their father Oedipus hides in a cave on the mountain where he was abandoned as a child, unwilling to see or speak with either. His final speech (350–362) indicates

²⁶ The threat of violence by Pyrrhus, son of the dead Achilles, is enough to make Agamemnon accede to the death of Polyxena in *Troas*; see Stroh, *supra*, p. 439. It is assumed that at least Eteocles and Polynices, and probably Jocasta, would die in *Phoenissae* if the play had been completed.

²⁷ Oedipus dominates one of the fragments that survives and Jocasta the other, which makes interpretation hazardous at best. Is the play principally about the two brothers, with Oedipus and Jocasta as secondary figures, or do the different reactions to family crisis foreground Oedipus and Jocasta, making the conflict of Eteocles and Polynices the cause célèbre? Frank *supra*, pp. 449–458 and her 1995 book chooses the latter. She also believes that the play is unfinished, which would reveal a great deal about how Seneca composed his plays. It became, however, popular to publish plays without choruses or in actor's guides (Marshall 2000 and elsewhere), so it is possible that what survives is the result of the extraction process.

how much he is resigned to what will happen, while Jocasta, their mother, opposes Eteocles, but is incapable of brokering a peace.

The point of sibling rivalry in royal houses is succession and inheritance,²⁸ one of the major themes of *Thyestes*. In the myth, which would have been known to the audience, the throne of Argos came with possession of the wife, as in the cases of Clytemnestra at Mycenae, and Helen at Sparta, and others. Adultery was the means by which Thyestes overthrew and exiled his brother.²⁹ His memory of this brings on Atreus's two most bile-filled rantings in his conversation with the attendant (204–335). He uses an extremely strong word (*stuprum*) for the adultery and uses the Latin for treachery (*fraus*) several times to describe his brother's actions. The story of Thyestes's theft of the *aries arcanus*, talisman of royal authority at Argos, is retold. The savage sexual past of this sordid family (Tantalus and Pelops) are examples of cruelty to be emulated and condoned and serve as a pretext for what Atreus proposes to do to Thyestes. By a perversion of logic, the suffering he will inflict on his brother takes on religious overtones, so that his sons are killed on altars like animals at sacrifice and served as if at a religious banquet. The degree of hostility Atreus reveals to the audience makes the scene of their supposed conciliation, with the two sets of cousins similarly affectionate, even more devastating.

IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL³⁰

Elaine Fantham and Gyllian Raby, both writing in Harrison's *Seneca in Performance*, have made the case for modern feminist perspectives on women in Senecan drama, particularly women in choruses. The female chorus in *Trojan Women*, survivors of the destruction of their town, contemplate where they will go, what they will be forced to do, and which Greek will become their owner. Days earlier they had all been noble women and respected matrons.³¹ Their status has changed abruptly and their acceptance is grudging

²⁸ This aspect of *Thyestes* is discussed in most detail by Davis 2003: 43–61.

²⁹ The motif of the wife conferring the throne had political resonance when Nero sought to divorce Octavia, daughter of Claudius. In a famous anecdote, Marcus Aurelius, when he was considering divorce, was advised that he should also “return the dowry” (i.e., the empire).

³⁰ The title for this section comes from the subtitle of a brilliant essay by the professional director Gyllian Raby 2000: 173–195.

³¹ Raby's approach (2000) is vindicated by Stroh's appraisal of his own 1993 production in an article written in 1994 (republished in English in Fitch 2008). Content is discussed on pages 202–215, with his dismissal of Raby in note 21. For Stroh's views of the play, see his

at best. Almost everyone in Rome knew someone or owned someone who was enslaved through one or another of Rome's seemingly endless conflicts. Troy could be any devastated city or culture and the captive women could, but for the grace of the gods and the army, be Rome itself. The chorus enunciates its fears: being forced to take abuse and serve a Greek mistress, being gawked at and poked as an oddity, loveless sexual servitude.³² Hecuba, once queen of Troy, surrenders her own identity so that her particular grief and sorrow as an old woman can contrast with the concerns for Astyanax, her still-living grandson, child of Hector and Andromache. Hecuba is so distracted over Priam, her dead husband, and her son Hector, that she is largely oblivious to her two living daughters, Cassandra and Polyxena, which increases the *pathos* when the Greeks come to take a daughter she had all but forgotten she had. Both are greatly different from Helen, whose death was promised by the husband she cuckolded, but who instead has found the wits to survive. Competing survival strategies are weighed: Hecuba assumes that class is more important to aristocrats than nationality; Andromache would rally active resistance while still possible, and then passive resistance; Helen chooses to rely on physical charm and suggests others show themselves pliable to their new masters. The chorus reacts by sitting in a defeated inertia.

Many of the characters, particularly the Greeks, in the *Trojan Women* are static; they emerge at the play's end no wiser than they started. The female chorus comes to terms with its situation more and more as the play progresses. There had been many deaths during the ten years of the war, but they would largely have happened on the battlefield out of their sight. The two that occur near to them and after the fall of the city have a galvanizing effect. Their first ode (67–167) mourns the dead and considers them lucky to be dead. The second song (371–408) follows the removal of Polyxena and challenges whether the soul is immortal.³³ The apprehension of Astyanax by the Greeks ends their hopes and so the chorus (814–860) reflects on the places in Greece they might be sent. Their fates are disclosed in the following passage, after which, as they exit, they consider the sweetness of grief because

contribution, *supra*, pp. 435–447. Production affects which themes are seen and how they are received: excellent examples are Raby's post-modernist staging with video monitor as opposed to the philological experiment (in Latin) of Stroh. Both are to be commended.

³² On this last point, especially, it is informative to contrast Euripides's *Trojan Women*; see Scodel 1998.

³³ Curiously this ode has received comparatively little independent scholarly attention; see, however, Marino 1996b: 57–73, and Stroh (cf. Harrison, *supra*, pp. 593 ff. nn. 11 and 32), who considers that the ode was sung by a chorus of Greek soldiers, adding more immediacy to the song.

it is a communal rite (1009–1055). For them Troy will survive as long as they have shared rituals that they can perform together. Troy will only disappear when they are dispersed.

A chorus of Trojan women is again on stage in Seneca's *Agamemnon* (589 to 781). It sings both as a group and its leader has a dialogue with Cassandra. They open with the same ironic "how sweet it is [...]" of the final ode in *Trojan Women*. They talk about regretting how love of life only exposes one to more evil and that the storms en route to Greece did not mercifully drown them. Bitterly, they remember how Troy was captured not by honorable battle but by a trick. To them, the fact that no one is left to mourn Troy is as terrible as the loss of Troy itself. They stand huddled and wonder what might happen next. They remind Cassandra that grief can have no limits or end and give several famous examples. After Cassandra's vision of Mycenae as the new Troy, she faints. As the chorus picks her up, they see Agamemnon approach from one direction and Clytemnestra from another. The chorus is displaced and confused. They are in an unfamiliar country, with no leader to direct them and with no desire even for consolation. Crying together is all they can think to do.³⁴

The chorus of captives in *Hercules Oetaeus* opens their first ode by comparing Hercules to the gods (104–172).³⁵ The words would have been instantly recognized as approximating the opening words of one of Latin's most famous love poems, itself a rendition of a similar one in Greek. Their admiration for their captor marks them as young virgins, and it takes them fifteen lines before they consider the destruction of their city and their unenviable position as survivors. As the ode continues, and as they think about the destruction of their town and the unbridled violence of Hercules, they recant their initial opinion, so that an ode, which began with "he is equal to the gods," ends with "in our sorrow we see a raving Hercules"; they have traded optimism for resignation. Iolè, their princess, enters and is lost in despair that she must now be a slave to the person who destroyed her city and slaughtered her family. The chorus seeks to ease her pain, and by extension their own, and so suggests (228–230) that "that person is fortunate who knows how to survive as king and pauper, and who can adjust his expressions accordingly."

³⁴ For a fuller analysis of this chorus, see Aricò 1996: 131–145.

³⁵ Much of what follows is based on a perceptive article by Tietze 1991. Phaedra also, so Fitch and McElduff 2002: 32–35, fights to preserve an identity she fears is eroding.

FORTUNE AND FATE³⁶

Fate (*fatum*) and fortune (*fortuna*) are Stoic commonplaces and, as such, the frequency of these two terms and their equivalents have been central to authors, like Rosenmeyer (1989), who have tried to link Senecan drama and Stoic cosmology. The chorus of *Hercules Oetaeus* attributes their condition to fortune—Hercules has it (105) and they did not (227). Harrison (2003) has argued for the opposition of fate and fortune as the most frequent trope in *Octavia* and identifies Seneca's plays as the probable source. *Fatum*, as personified by the Fates, are actions that must happen; no mortals or even gods can escape from the decrees of the Fates. Famously, in the *Iliad*, Zeus would have tried to save his son Sarpedon from death, but even he could not change fate. *Fortuna* are things that are possible, as in Caesar's famous saying that "each man made his own good luck." Plutarch, a younger contemporary of Seneca's and thus important for comparisons, wrote essays on the *fortuna* of Julius Caesar and of Alexander showing how great leaders could by force of intellect and personality manipulate events, bending the outcome to their will.

Fortune, related to the word for "chance" (*fors*), in tragedy generally lifts one up in order to make the fall more drastic, as Seneca says when he comes on stage in *Octavia*. In *Agamemnon*, Thyestes exults that Fortune has not yet stained his family too badly (28)³⁷ and he sees his own role as governed by the Fates (33). The opening words (57) of the chorus of Mycenaean women are that fortune is slippery, especially toward good deeds.³⁸ This idea hardly needs further elucidation, but they add the image of Fortune turning a wheel, and when a king reaches the top, he tumbles off (71 f.). A third time (101 f.), the chorus says that Fortune is on the point of destroying what it has raised on high. The chorus of Trojan women (590–719) has first-hand experience of adverse fortune—only an inexplicable love of life can seem to master it (594). They wallow in the destruction of Troy, but then notice that Cassandra has taken off her signs of office as a priestess (693 f.). Cassandra's reply to their query is that "Fortune has used itself up" (698) because what is past is over

³⁶ The sections that follow look at frequently repeated concepts, or clusters of concepts (most often in conflict), as themes in Seneca's plays. This practice was observed (if incorrectly criticized) by T.S. Eliot in his famous mot: "In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word"; cf. Mastronarde (1970 [2008]: 221 ff.), who examines the themes in *Oedipus*.

³⁷ "Stained" is used by Strophius of Clytemnestra near the end of the play (948).

³⁸ Kugelmeier, *supra*, p. 494. One can contrast the chorus of *Thyestes* on the mutability of good luck; see Torre, *supra*, p. 507.

and cannot be undone. Her focus, instead, is on a vision (761–774) in which the three Fates are waving whips and kicking bones, and she comments that they love to see the end of royal houses. After Cassandra's vision, fortune and fate disappear from the text of the play; there is only watching fate happen (*venere fata*: 885).

Poe's interpretation of Seneca's *Oedipus* (1983: 140–158; Töchterle, *supra*, p. 490) stresses its similarities with Sophocles's *Oedipus rex* and sees fate as the main theme in Seneca's play. Fear (see below) is more likely to be the main theme, but fate is rarely far removed. In Sophocles, Oedipus valiantly fights to restore the *fortuna* of Thebes and repel his fate, and each new indication that points yet more strongly at the secret of his birth is met with heroic resistance. For Seneca, there is no suspense in revealing Oedipus's true identity and so the drama of the play is carried by the unnerving fear that makes it impossible to withstand each new blow. Sandbags are not being hurled in front of the cracking dike; rather, one watches in horror as the breach grows. The water image is apt because in *Oedipus* fortune is not contrasted to fate; rather, bad luck (*fallax bonum*: 6) works in concert to intensify the mischief that fate prepares (28). The simile that Seneca puts in Oedipus's mouth (10f.) is of ships that fortune can overturn at sea even when the waves are slight.

FAMA (GOOD REPUTATION) AND *FAVOR* (PUBLIC APPROVAL)

Octavia does not have good luck (*fortuna*) or destiny (*fatum*). What she does have are *fama* and *favor*.³⁹ *Fama*, as used by Seneca, is cognate with “fame” and is also used in this sense in *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus*. It is, however, as often analogous to what would be termed a “good reputation.”⁴⁰ *Favor* is having approval, most often of mortals but also of gods. This approval is never

³⁹ The juxtaposition of these four elements is stressed by Harrison in his performance script for *Octavia* (2009) and discussed in his notes for directors. Most of what follows on *Octavia* comes from a manuscript by Harrison in revision and from Lauren Donovan's Brown PhD thesis, in progress, directed by David Konstan. I am grateful to Lauren for sharing her research with me.

⁴⁰ Standard research tools, such as the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, show how individual words, including especially those discussed here, can have multiple meanings, and can be used in several senses by the same author sometimes within the same work. Seneca and Nero in *Octavia*, for example, have very different interpretations of “justice” and “power.” They do not understand each other, in part, because key words and concepts do not have the same meaning for each.

granted, but must be earned and can easily be forfeited. “Fame” and “favor” can run in tandem or be in opposition, just as the two meanings of *fama* are held up to one another. This juxtaposition, and sometimes deliberate confusion, is more omnipresent in *Octavia* than in any other Latin play, and supplies its dramatic conflict, whose resolution is *force majeure*. If perhaps not as satisfying as the resolution of the great themes that propel Greek tragedy,⁴¹ it does have the virtue of ringing true to life and history.

The first words from the chorus of Roman citizens queries what rumor (*fama*) has come to their ears. Immediately, however, they switch to another sense of *fama*, when they count in Octavia's favor that only her child would guarantee peace at home and abroad—why else would the greatest and best possible Juno have been installed in the palace? Octavia shows religious scruples such as a proper devotion to the cult of her deified father, Claudius. She was a virgin when married and remains chaste and modest.⁴² The longest section of the chorus is a spirited enactment of the murder of Agrippina: posterity (359) will never forget Nero's part in the crime. Agrippina burns with anger (*ardens ira*: 331), and her reproaches contrast Nero's behavior (*amens*, “insanity”: 337) and character (*monstrum*, “monster”: 372) with Octavia's.

Singing to the chorus of male citizens, Octavia requests that the affection they feel for her (648) not lead them to something rash. The chorus sees that her good reputation (670) shone for a while, but that Poppaea is now in charge. The chorus of young women sympathetic to Poppaea, by contrast, thinks of *fama* as traditional stories from myth (762), generally loaded with kinky sex. Their insouciance is challenged by report of the riot on behalf of Octavia (*favore*: 786). Their regard (*favor*: 792) for Octavia has led them to throw down all the statues of Poppaea. Nero's reaction is to order repression so fierce that no age will forget (*famae*: 857). Bloodied and beaten, the chorus of Roman citizens reappears and sings an ode (872–898) on how popular support brought down the great heroes of the Roman republic. Taking examples from women in the imperial family, they then bring together the syllogism (924–957) that the human race is ruled by fate (924) and to that *fama* and *favor* bring a fortune than which nothing else can be more savage (931).

⁴¹ Ferri 2003a in his commentary notes what he considers the shortcomings of *Octavia* vis-à-vis classical Greek tragedy; see also his chapter, *supra*, pp. 521–527.

⁴² Seneca, in his debate with Nero (547f.), echoes that Octavia is above reproach.

FUROR (FURY) AND RATIO (REASON)

De ira ("On Anger"), is recognized as one of Seneca's most widely read and most influential essays. In the essay, Seneca recommends that anger can be tamed by reason, something in which the characters in his play show little interest. For scholars, such as Aygon (2008), who wish to see the plays as extensions of his philosophy, the opposition of the rational and irrational in plays steeped in jealousy, envy, and family hatred seems natural. "Fury" needs no explanation, and in Seneca "fury" can be anthropomorphized into the three snaky-haired, fire-eyed, poison-drooling goddesses of Hell who urge mortals on to unspeakable crimes, such as in *Hercules furens* and *Thyestes*. Human reason (*ratio*) fights against divinely inspired fury. Tantalus, in the prologue to *Thyestes*, attempts to return to his torture in Tartarus rather than be the contagion of more suffering in his family; Atreus, on the other hand, willingly and happily breathes in the virus. If anything, he is disappointed that he is not even more possessed by anger. *Thyestes* remains the most impressive of Seneca's dramas because the struggle between fury and reason involves also the tenuous supremacy of order over chaos and reason over passion. When the Fury defeats Tantalus, and Atreus dares the Furies to strike him (250–254), the world as we would like it to be, comfortably constructed, disappears.⁴³ The way in which the chorus and Thyestes represent reason and a return to order (i.e., family values as rosy Roman tradition liked to dissemble) is a sham. The audience finds itself, at least temporarily, preferring to collude with evil. Thyestes, on balance, excites as little sympathy as Atreus; only the ghost of Tantalus attempts to behave nobly.

Tarrant (1985: 43–48) is correct that Atreus cannot be insane—his *furor* has *ratio*. Where the modern idiom is sexual ("lust for power"), Atreus is self-aware enough to admit he has a "frenzy" for ruling (*furor*: 302). He has been plotting his revenge against Thyestes for years,⁴⁴ biding his time while Thyestes's three sons grew. All were now adolescents, old enough and strong enough for a parent to invest himself entirely in their potential for securing kingdoms or fiefs of their own. If Atreus were psychotic, his kingdom would have suffered all those years, and the play gives no evidence of this. If he were insane, his scheming would have been detected, or his plan would have been simplistic and flawed. Atreus not only invited the Furies to infect him, he whipped himself up like a worshipper of Bacchus, god of wine. Agave,

⁴³ This reading of *Thyestes* comes mainly from Schiesaro 2003.

⁴⁴ See Littlewood 2004: 25–31 for an analysis of this theme in *Thyestes*.

mother of Pentheus, fell into such a frenzy that she dismembered her own son. Tereus was consumed by such passion that he forced himself on his sister-in-law. His wife got revenge by serving their son, Itys, to Tereus. Atreus looks for a *furor* that will make his crime greater than theirs and in fact he will carve up and serve three relatives, not one.

Billerbeck (1999: 30–38) has called *Hercules furens* a psychological drama. That psychology can operate at two levels. The first is whether Hercules is actually assailed by Lyssa, one of the Furies, on behalf of Juno or whether in his madness he merely believes he is being driven mad. The second is which version the audience believes, or is meant to believe. Hercules can be played so that he fights against the rising tide of insanity; even as he kills his children and wife he still sees what he is doing and in some corner of his mind realizes what he is doing. The *furor* that Juno promised to unleash in the prologue thus also becomes double: it can be the madness that descends upon Hercules, or it can be what Juno would do if she chose. She is not without anger herself, and Seneca has Agamemnon (*Tro.* 276–291) draw the chain of causality from burning up with anger (*ira et ardens*) to unrestrained fury (*furor et libido*). In real life, people rarely go through with what they threaten when angry, and thankfully so. The question must be how far Juno was prepared to go if she were other than a figment of Hercules's madness.⁴⁵ Her anger and Hercules's madness become intertwined in an elaborate dance. The audience must also decide which is worse: the premeditated, unchecked anger of a goddess or the momentary madness of a mortal.

The *furor* of Cassandra in *Agamemnon* had been prophetic inspiration (869, 872; Kugelmeier, *supra*, p. 500), which neatly transformed itself into the rage that gave Clytemnestra the strength to lift the double-headed axe to decapitate Agamemnon (894, 897). One is a prophetic act and the other a personal one. But in the political arena fury is propelled by fear. Both Electra (910–917) and Strophius (918–933) in the same play are driven to rage by fears for the safety of Orestes and, to a lesser extent, themselves. When that fear is removed, Electra can discount death threats from Clytemnestra. The prologue stated that powerful people had to fear fate. The play ends as Clytemnestra leads Cassandra to her death. Clytemnestra says, “crazy woman, you will die.” Cassandra replies, “*furor* will come to you, too.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ I find O’Kell’s suggestion that Hercules knew exactly what he was doing when he killed Megara (2005: 191) very persuasive. Much also is attractive in Shelton 1975: 266 f.

⁴⁶ This discussion hardly exhausts the topic; see also in this volume Liebermann, *supra*, pp. 465, 467, Töchterle, *supra*, p. 488, Frank, *supra*, p. 453, and other scholars such as Fantham 1975: 8.

FEAR AND POWER

The key central section of *De clementia* comparing a good king to a bad king is carefully paraphrased, almost section by section in order, in *Thyestes* in a dialogue trading platitudes between Atreus and his retainer (175–336), followed by the famous choral ode, “he is a king who [...]” (337–403).⁴⁷ Schiesaro (2003: 154) is both right and wrong to conclude that the credence given to the discussion depends upon who is speaking: to him this exchange in *Thyestes* has to be facetious.⁴⁸ The chorus reappears, oblivious to what has just occurred. If there is any irony, it is in the relief the tone of their lines conveys.⁴⁹

The scene opens with a soliloquy in which Atreus chastens himself for being, in his eyes, ineffective and tries to enrage (*iratus*: 180) himself even more. He ends the lines to himself with deadly insight into human instinct, in which a hunted man’s predictable actions are equated with a hunted animal’s. Atreus craves the notoriety of having done something so terrible that no one had ever thought of it before. His retainer asks whether the prospect of notoriety (*fama* [...] *adversa*: 204 f.) terrifies him. Atreus considers it the greatest achievement to compel people to praise the king regardless of what he does. The servant suggests that Atreus should not rule by fear but earn popular approval and show restraint (*pudor*), concern for the law, piety, and trustworthiness. Atreus dismisses these all as private virtues that would limit the public exercise of power. The crux is that it is wrong for Atreus to harm a brother even though he harmed him, which Atreus refuses to countenance.

Fear can exist without cringing from power, or perhaps more aptly fear feeds on the inability of power to act.⁵⁰ This is a different kind of fear and it is

⁴⁷ Discussion of *De clementia* in the *Octavia* is found in Harrison 2003; discussion of *Thyestes* is found in Tarrant 1985, Schiesaro 2003: 151–176, and Shelton 1975: 262 f. Power is also at the center of *Phoenissae* (Frank, *supra*, pp. 452, 457).

⁴⁸ Since the scene between Nero and Seneca in *Octavia* (437–592) is so closely modeled on this scene, an interpretation of the exchange in *Thyestes* as sarcastic has implications for the interpretation of the scene in *Octavia*.

⁴⁹ It is worth noting, however, that sections of rapid, short exchanges (stichomythy) are perfectly suited for one character to mislead his respondent, or to be ambiguous, or ironic; see, esp., Littlewood 2004: 36–57, but also Littlewood 1997: 59–61.

⁵⁰ What follows is an extrapolation from Konstan 2001 on pity, which benefits from our correspondence.

one that animates Seneca's rendition of the Greek myth of Oedipus. His is not Sophocles's Oedipus, caught in unintended incest but guilty nonetheless, who was so central to the development of Freud's philosophy. Instead, knowledge generally dispels fear, yet each new discovery only intensifies the feeling of foreboding.⁵¹ For the choruses of captive women in the plays, the loss of their cities and freedom was a form of closure, if not the desired one. For Medea, the reality of her divorce freed her from the fear of it. What was left was to decide a response. But in *Oedipus*, by line 35, Oedipus already senses something is terribly amiss and that responsibility will somehow cling to him. Jocasta (81–86) reminds him in vain that it is the ruler's job to solve the people's problems. The timidity of years in power, however, has overtaken him and his prologue is filled with words for trembling and cowering. He remembers that he once solved the riddle of the Sphinx, but that earlier bravery and sagacity have deserted him. He is even unable to seek the answers himself, delegating Creon instead. When it is discovered that Oedipus is somehow responsible, Creon and the chorus try to find a way to excuse him. A resolute leader would have earned forgiveness; Oedipus becomes querulous and combative. Nothing good—so the retainer to Atræus in *Thyestes* and Seneca to Nero in *Octavia*—comes from fear instilled by power; fear as a motivator is equally incapable of finding solutions that benefit the state and its people.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE SELF AND TO THE STATE

One theme that is not often remarked in scholarship,⁵² but that seems to be present in many of Seneca's plays is one in which the characters at some point are posed a dilemma in which they must choose between their own personal interests or the interests of the state. Phaedra's passion and Clytemnestra's concern for her children's position are more important to them than care for the kingdom in which they live. It is the choice Oedipus must make, and his parents before him. Laius, king of Thebes, received an oracle that his son would depose him.⁵³ The ancients never seem to have

⁵¹ See, esp., Henry and Walker 1983: 128–139 and the two contributions on *Oedipus* in Boyle's *Seneca Tragicus* 1983a. Fear in *Trojan Women*, to choose one example, is usually a fear of death; see Stroh, *supra*, pp. 436, 440, 447.

⁵² Fitch and McElduff 2002: 157–180 have written an insightful article, "Construction of the Self in Senecan Drama"; self-construction can easily spill over into self-justification.

⁵³ Similar oracles are known for Paris, Perseus, and Jason (given to his uncle), and are even

needed to pose the question whether Laius acted from personal motives rather than the interests of the state in ordering Oedipus's exposure, rather than his summary execution. Oedipus garners tremendous sympathy from the audience because he demonstrably acted from unselfish motives when he left Corinth so as not to fulfill an oracle he received. In attempting to frustrate the oracle, he fulfilled it.

The theme is of potential importance for a fresh look at *Phaedra*, because each of the three main characters chooses their desires over duty to the commonweal.⁵⁴ One learns immediately that Hippolytus is self-absorbed in hunting and nothing at any point in the play suggests that he has had any interest in the governance of Athens during his father's absence. When he does come to the palace and it finally dawns on him what Phaedra is suggesting, his reaction is entirely personal and impolitic. If he had not expressed such revulsion, with personal attacks on Phaedra, the situation might possibly have been recovered. The strength of his anger and the manner of its expression makes Phaedra desperate.

She has fewer options but perhaps also less blame. Evidence in the play suggests that she has been the only one in the palace and thus effectively running the state. Her assumption that Theseus is dead is logical, as is her decision to look out for her own survival. Her passion, however, places her personal interests paramount, as is the case with Nero in *Octavia*.

The greatest opprobrium should be reserved for Theseus, who, in the fashion of too many heroes of Greek myth, has left his kingdom for many years. He has gone on adventures with his closest companion, several of which ended in disaster. The centaurs at the Lapith wedding are dead, and even when he was released from the underworld, he went to Thebes first, rather than directly home, where he witnessed the madness of Hercules. Now back in Athens, he believes his wife, without evidence, and makes an instantaneous decision. Having been granted three wishes by the king of the sea he uses the third and last for revenge rather than for the good of the state. His remorse is personal, even though he has denied the state the heir to his throne.

part of the Roman pseudo-historical tradition, in which Numitor is eventually killed by his nephews, Romulus and Remus.

⁵⁴ Roisman 2000 presents this fresh view of Seneca's *Phaedra*, which builds upon her book on Euripides's *Hippolytus* (*Nothing is as it seems: The tragedy implicit in Euripides' "Hippolytus"* 1999).

DIVINE CAUSATION VERSUS PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY⁵⁵

The relationship between divine causation and personal responsibility is perhaps the most significant theme in Greek tragedy, even if divine machinery was of less importance to writers of Seneca's lifetime and later.⁵⁶ Even so, divine jealousy motivates the action of several plays, notably *Hercules furens*, while religious pollution is a main theme of *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*. The politics of religion remained potent: in the year following Seneca's death (AD 66) Nero closed the temple to Apollo at Delphi because it refused to give him an oracle, claiming that he, like the tragic hero Orestes, was a matricide. Plutarch, later head priest at this temple, wrote three essays on the Delphic oracle. The subject was topical during Seneca's lifetime and several of his plays consider the issue of whether the gods speak to mankind in oracles anymore, whether such advice is wanted or, perhaps better, whether the advice is worth having.

Cassandra (*Ag.* 721–760), for example, begs to have the gift of prophecy removed, because all of her visions have been of horrible deaths. Because the future is inescapable, the prophecy in *Oedipus* does not save him. The chorus (*Oed.* 114–204) has a sense that the plague must foretell the fall of another ruling dynasty at Thebes, but they are not sure and attempts to secure omens through sacrifice fail because the cattle, when opened, are putrid. The seer Teiresias and his daughter and assistant Manto are summoned, but their haruspicy is hardly more successful (*Oed.* 292–402). The flame on the incense bifurcates, the bull is terrified and, stabbed twice, wanders off; the heifer dies in a single stroke, as it ought. One bleeds profusely, which is proper for sacrifice, but the other dribbles gore from the mouth and nose. The heart of the bull is withered and the liver oozes bile, the organs are all in the wrong place, and the lungs clogged. It is hardly better with the heifer: a virgin, she is found to have a foetus, and moves about even though dead. The sacrificial animals refuse to reveal the secret information sought. Summoning the ghost (extispicy) of the murdered king, Laius, is the only option. Creon hesitantly relates the ceremony to Oedipus (509–708) in all its grizzly details; even

⁵⁵ Much of this section, particularly on *Oedipus*, comes from my involvement in the production of Ned Dickens's rendition of Seneca's *Oedipus* in Montreal (April 2009) under the direction of Ursula Neuberburg-Denzer. Dickens's *Oedipus* was one of seven plays of the Theban cycle, entitled *City of Wine*.

⁵⁶ On this point one should consult Boyle's introductions to his books on Seneca's tragedies (1997) and on *Octavia* (2008). It is significant that Seneca's nephew, Lucan, left the gods out of his epic on the war between Pompey and Caesar.

when all the rituals were performed, the ghost was still reluctant to appear. Haruspicy and extispicy appealed greatly to Romans; these two scenes are as successful as the witches' scenes in *Macbeth* and were imitated by Seneca's nephew, Lucan, in his epic. Yet it is specifically scenes like that with Manto in *Oedipus* that have convinced Fitch (2000) and Rosenmeyer (1993) that divine superstructure in Seneca is mainly for stage spectacle and not an integral part of the plot.

It might be possible for someone to argue that Oedipus's murder of his father and marriage to his mother was brought on by his belief that he, a mere mortal, could somehow escape the laws of fate. Oedipus surely should have thought twice about marrying a woman twice his age; given the oracle, he should have restricted his attentions only to women much younger than himself. There were many times Oedipus could have stopped his tragedy, but blinded by power, he became morally blind; his later actual blindness was its physical manifestation. There is little here in divine causation to exculpate personal responsibility and there was even an oracle that could have been of guidance. Oedipus admits as much in the first fragment of *Phoenissae* (1–319).⁵⁷ His daughter Antigone attempts to convince him that he is innocent, but Oedipus is so morose over his religious pollution that she is only barely able to convince him to stay alive.

The opposite is true in *Hercules furens*, where Hercules returns to lucidity, accepts his pollution for what he has done, and considers suicide as the only way to end the contagion. His father is more successful than Antigone was in counseling acceptance. For Hercules, expiation is possible, an alternative not offered to Oedipus. Apollo had killed the sacred snake at Delphi and was sold into slavery for a year to Admetus to atone for it. Hercules likewise will be sold in slavery to queen Omphale. Oedipus and Hercules are unusual in Seneca: his characters are more likely to embrace and revel in the religious impurity they bring on themselves by murdering a family member (Medea, Clytemnestra, Atreus). Phaedra and Deianira (*Hercules Oetaeus*) kill themselves out of shame and not as an act of repentance.

The final choral ode (1053–1137) does not question Hercules's responsibility. The chorus invites all of heaven and earth to mourn, and to release his mind from monsters, returning it to sanity (1064f.). The last lines of the ode dwell not upon Hercules—someone will come to help him—but upon his innocent children for whom there can be no help.

⁵⁷ See, esp., Frank 1995a: 5f.

CONCLUSION: THEMES AS CIPHERS FOR IMPERIAL PERSONAGES

O'Kell has most recently argued for the composition of Seneca's plays as positive and negative exemplars for the young Nero, and that Hercules is the most important figure, a paradigm of *virtus* in its sense of "civic-minded heroism" and a figure with whom Nero had identified from an early part of his life.⁵⁸ Behind the deification of Hercules must lie the apotheosis of two emperors within Seneca's lifetime: Augustus, when he was an adolescent, and Claudius, partly through Seneca's own political calculations but famously parodied in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*.⁵⁹ Emperors and members of their families often posed as deities, Augustus and Nero as Apollo, Tiberius and Claudius as Jupiter, Caligula as both gods and goddesses. Hercules, a mortal who became a god, acts as advocate for Claudius in his audience before the gods in *Apocolocyntosis*. Hercules links the emperors to immortality, or at least pretensions of divinity. The divine machinery in the plays stands in parallel to imperial personalities and may be a mask for them.⁶⁰ This is never more important than in *Hercules Oetaeus*, whose probable date of composition is during the reign of Domitian, an emperor who identified himself with Hercules. Slater (1996) and Boyle (2008: xxi) have both noted that Nero himself appeared on stage wearing a mask with his own features (initially) and later those of Poppaea, the wife he accidentally killed in a rage. The roles Nero chose are familiar from Seneca's plays and the themes of matricide, insanity, and incest are familiar from the plays discussed *supra*.

It would not be difficult to see Messalina and Silius lurking behind Phaedra's illicit love, which ended in the ruin of everyone but Theseus. Not all of the details of the play have to match historical incidents; it would have been dangerous to do so.⁶¹ Beyond Messalina and Silius as paramours in illicit love is the theme of "incest" in *Phaedra*.⁶² *Incasta* in Latin need

⁵⁸ O'Kell 2005: 185–204. This is according to an anecdote about Nero and snakes preserved by both Tacitus (*ann.* 11.11.6) and Suetonius (*Nero* 6). *Virtus* is defined in *Hercules furens* at 205–323 and 138–1344. Nero was closely related to Marc Antony, who claimed descent from Hercules.

⁵⁹ For *Apocolocyntosis*, see Roncali, *infra*, pp. 673–686.

⁶⁰ See, esp., Fuhrmann 1997: 208–215.

⁶¹ In the example of *Phaedra*, the play probably predates her bigamy, but her behavior had been scandalous for so many years that her ultimate disaster was predictable.

⁶² Mayer (*supra*, p. 478) is willing to countenance a connection between *Phaedra* and the imperial court. For imperial ideology in other plays, see, e.g., Liebermann, *supra*, pp. 464, 473 and Torre, *supra*, p. 509. Habinek's 2000 essay, "Seneca's Renown," draws its examples from Seneca's philosophical works. As many parallels can be seen in the plays.

mean no more than “not approved” or “socially stigmatized.” Latin law was inconsistent on what counted as “incest.” One hundred years earlier Cicero had married his ward, which was not illegal but was roundly disapproved. Claudius married his second cousin (Messalina), which was not considered incestuous, but he passed a variance in law so that he could marry his niece (Agrippina). The subject of incest was thus topical in Claudius’s reign, but the mythical Hippolytus would have been no more closely related to Phaedra, his stepmother, than Cicero to his ward.

Hercules Oetaeus was almost certainly the last of the surviving Latin tragedies to be written and so its ending should perhaps serve as the last words here. Upon his death Hercules is transformed, as promised, into a god. He had complained throughout the play that his courage and his many great services to gods and man deserved the recognition of divinity.⁶³ Earning immortality is what each of the main characters in all of the plays is after, even if this is not overtly stated, and perhaps us, too, which must be one of the reasons why the plays still insist on being read and staged. Hercules, in words of comfort to his mother, says, “virtue never dies.” This is the opposite of what Marc Antony says of Caesar in Shakespeare. The dissolution and disasters of royal houses—kings behaving badly—holds endless fascination, while the survival of virtue is reassuring. “Virtue,” however, should not be understood in the modern sense of the term; *virtus*, for a Roman, was closer to “courage” and implied, by extension, “courageous acts” or “acts taken at considerable personal risk.” This connects all the heroes in Seneca: Agamemnon, for example, in the conquest of Troy has *virtus* even if he does not show evidence of Christian virtue. In *Hercules furens*, Amphytrion asks his son to demonstrate this kind of virtue and not kill himself.⁶⁴ It is this kind of virtue, of which only heroes and emperors who know all the risks and all that is at stake are capable, that never dies.

⁶³ Hercules complains repeatedly that he has earned divinity, but he is not the only character in the play to make this assertion; see Micu 1981: 213–220.

⁶⁴ For virtue in *Hercules furens* and *Hercules Oetaeus*, see Shelton 1978: 32–39 and Billerbeck 1999: 20–22.

GREEK AND ROMAN ELEMENTS IN SENECA TRAGEDY

Sander M. Goldberg

At some point early in the second century BC—the precise year and occasion are beyond recall—a Roman actor in the dress and mask of an old woman appeared on a makeshift stage, paused to consider the crowd that was jostling for places to hear him, and then, as acrobats, clowns, barkers, and maybe even a dancing bear entertained their own audiences nearby, he spoke the following words:

If only the fir timbers in the Pelian grove
had not been struck by axes and fallen to earth [...].

So began the play posterity would know as Ennius's *Medea exul*, which would in time become a classic of the Roman stage and eventually a staple of the school curriculum.¹ Only fragments now survive: our knowledge of the play and of the theatrical tradition to which it belonged must of necessity owe more to conjecture than to fact. What we do not know about Republican tragedy, however, should not overshadow some important things we do know. Early tragedy, despite the lack of theaters, was a preeminently theatrical entertainment. It came to Rome as a commercial enterprise in the hands of skilled professionals, and like those contemporary comedies written in the tradition of *palliatae*, it claimed a direct debt to one or another Greek original. In this case, Ennius's opening invites direct comparison to Euripides's *Medea* (1–4):

Εἴθ' ὥφελ' Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος
Κόλχων ἐς αἶαν κυανέας Συμπληγάδας,
μηδ' ἐν νάπαισι Πηλίου πεσεῖν ποτε
τμηθεῖσα πεύκη [...].

If only the ship Argo had not sailed off
through the blue Symplegades to the land of Colchis,
nor in the groves of Pelion had the pine, struck, ever
fallen [...].

¹ *Utinam ne in nemore Pelio securibus / caesa accidisset abieгна ad terram trabes [...]* (208f. J). Jocelyn 1967: 342–356 provides authoritative discussion of the play and its prologue. Fewer than forty lines survive in all, but there is ample testimony to its enduring fame. Marshall 2006: 31–48 reviews the conditions of performance at Republican *ludi scaenici* alluded to here.

How many of those in the original audience would have understood this invitation for what it was and appreciated the debt that Ennius is acknowledging must remain an open question, but for us, the nine surviving lines of Ennius's prologue immediately encourage consideration of how he understood and adapted the Euripidean play to the exigencies of his Roman environment.²

It would be wrong to press their relationship too closely or to focus exclusively on it. However well versed Ennius was in the dramatic texts of fifth-century Athens, he would, as a second-century tragedian, inevitably have read them with Hellenistic eyes. Roman tragedy was a Hellenistic genre, and its aesthetic owed more to contemporary Greek styles of performance than to the "classical" Athenian one.³ Yet for studying this play, it is beyond doubt appropriate and helpful to think of Euripides, of Ennius as an adapter of Euripides, and of Republican tragedy as one of Attic tragedy's most important descendants. To distinguish Greek and Roman elements in such a play is therefore a meaningful, though difficult, enterprise, for it gets to the core of what was happening in the creation of an Ennian tragedy.

Tragedy in Seneca's day was quite different, and its study requires different strategies. The conditions of performance, if and when there were performances, are more obscure than ever: how much the monumental theaters of the empire had to do with the performance of tragedies remains uncertain. The study of later tragic texts is no less problematic. Specifically Greek elements are harder to identify in them than in their Republican predecessors and harder to understand when they are identified. The opening of Seneca's *Medea*, for example, evokes neither Ennius nor Euripides (1–4):

Di coniugales, tuque genialis tori,
Lucina, custos, quaeque domituram freta
Tiphyn novam frenare docuisti ratem
et tu, profundi saeve dominator maris [...].

God of marriage, and you, guardian of
the marriage bed, Lucina, and you who taught
Tiphys to bridle the hull that would tame the billows,
and you, fierce tamer of the deep sea [...].

² The explicit acknowledgment of Greek models common in Plautus and Terence is not attested in the meager remains of Republican tragedy, but Pl. *Poen.* 1–4, citing Aristarchus's *Achilles* but quoting Ennius's version, implies direct identification of the one with the other. See Jocelyn 1967: 164–167.

³ The most widely recognized characteristics of Hellenistic dramatic technique are surveyed by Tarrant 1978: 218–254, and from the Greek perspective, Xanthakis-Karamanos 1980: 6–14, Easterling 1997.

The Pelian grove is far away. The Argo is recalled not in regret over what is past but in hope of turning the past to present advantage. Medea herself begins this play, and her wish is that Minerva, who taught Tiphys to steer the magical ship and so to rival the power of Neptune, should not restore the order of nature but support yet one more reversal of it.⁴

This Medea is already resolute. Hers is not the Euripidean world, though it is a world that knows Euripides. We might call it post-Euripidean, since the action that unfolds will provide ample reason to accept Wilamowitz's oft-quoted assertion: "Diese Medea hat offenbar die Medea des Euripides gelesen." ("This Medea has evidently read the *Medea* of Euripides.")⁵ Yet she has clearly read much else besides Euripides. Knowledge of her own myth has been informed not just by Euripides's play and, presumably, Ennius's *Medea exul* and Ovid's lost Medea tragedy, but most demonstrably by the Medea figures of *Metamorphoses* 7 and *Heroides* 12, and by the destructive passions unleashed in *Aeneid* 4. Detailed comparisons of Euripides and Seneca can still be instructive (e.g., Segal 1984, Gill 1987), but the comparative exercise is fruitful because it focuses on alternative constructions of character and motivation, not on a search for similarities and sources.

Even in cases where Seneca does clearly model himself on Euripides, the result may not support a narrowly constructed style of source criticism. The first chorus of *Hercules furens*, for example, announces the coming of dawn and imagines the new round of human activity about to begin in country and town, on land and sea, as the earth awakens (125–127):

Iam rara micant
sidera prono languida mundo;
nox victa vagos contrahit ignes
luce renata.

Now the stars shine
scattered and faint in a sinking heaven;
Night, defeated, gathers her wayward fires
as daylight is reborn.

⁴ The implications of the echo *domituram freta* and *dominator maris* become explicit later in the phrases *dominus profundum* (597, of Neptune) and *dominator profundum* (617, of Tiphys). See Littlewood 2004: 148–153.

⁵ Wilamowitz 1906: 162, with specific reference to *Med.* 164–172. Medea's self-awareness reaches an intertextual climax at 910 (*Medea nunc sum: crevit ingenium malis*), with its bilingual pun on *ingenium* and *μήτις*, the root of *Μήδεα* (Fitch and McElduff 2002: 26, with further examples.) Such literary awareness is hardly unique to Medea: "all the characters in these tragedies are intensely aware of their previous existence in the domain of literature" (Schiesaro 2003: 223). The conceit is Ovidian (Tarrant 1995: 222–224).

This ode (calling it the “parodos” begs too important a question) is noteworthy among Senecan lyrics for its integration, both formally and thematically, into the dramatic context. Its beginning looks back to Juno’s preceding exit line and its close looks ahead to the arrival of Megara and her family; its focus on the rhythm of daily life and the forces governing that life establishes the natural limits of human existence to which Hercules will prove so tragically unable to conform.⁶ Yet however well fitted it is to Seneca’s immediate dramatic context, the ode in fact represents what students of Republican drama call a *contaminatio*, an element taken from one play and set into another.⁷ In this case, the model is found not in the Euripidean Heracles play to which Seneca in other respects clearly owes much, but to the parodos of his *Phaethon* (63–66):

ἤδη μὲν ἀρτιφανῆς
 Ἄως ἰ[ππεύει] κατὰ γᾶν,
 ὑπὲρ δ’ ἐμᾶς κεφαλᾶς
 Πλειά[δων πέφευγε χορός] [...].

Now the newly-appearing
 Dawn gallops over the earth,
 and above my head
 the chorus of Pleiades has fled [...].

Structural similarities preserve unmistakable traces of the debt, but as so often in interpolations of this type, the changes wrought in the course of importation are at least as important as what stays the same.

The thrust of Euripides’s song, from the waning of night through the stirring of human activity on land and sea as the earth awakens, is the same, but Seneca expands each of its elements (twenty-eight Euripidean lines become eighty Senecan lines), and he shifts from an idyllic mode to something considerably harsher (137 f.):

Labor exoritur durus et omne
 sagitat curas aperitque domos.

Hard work rises and arouses
 every care and awakens every house.

Read as a version of Euripides’s set-piece, the Senecan ode seems merely swollen with generalities and clichés.⁸ Change the horizon of expectation,

⁶ Good discussion of this by Fitch 1987a: 158–163.

⁷ The term is derived from Ter. *Andr.* 16: *contaminari non decere fabulas*. For examples of *contaminatio* in Seneca, see Tarrant 1978: 216 f.

⁸ So Diggle 1970: 96 f.: “The motifs which receive brief and incisive illustration from Euripides are exploited by Seneca to tedious excess. [...] There are few points of interest

however, and the verdict is quite different. Seneca develops (and shifts) the sense of the passage using images, structures, and values that build upon those of his Augustan predecessors. Read as Roman poetry asks to be read, the ode reveals itself not as mere rhetorical puffery but as a new Latin poem created in a Latin tradition, set in a Euripidean frame and mounted in a dramatic context. The challenge in assessing such a piece of work begins with the very utility of recognizing its ostensible Greek model. Is that model an aid or a distraction when differences prove to be as significant as similarities?

Senecan tragedy's dual status as poetry and as drama further complicates the interpretive problem. It is certainly significant, at least at some level, that the Roman predecessors widely recognized as informing this ode of *Hercules furens*—Virgil's *Georgics*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Horace's *Odes*—are not dramatic, and it may be indicative of Seneca's reading habits and priorities that he probably encountered his Euripidean model first as a poetic set piece rather than in context as the parodos of *Phaethon*. The ode was anthologized by the third century BC, if not before, and had already been appropriated by at least one other tragic poet.⁹ Seneca's relationship to this Euripidean "model" is clearly different from the kind of modeling Ennius did when developing a Euripidean idea. More sources, more *Roman* sources, are drawn upon, and the growing appreciation of Seneca's extensive debts to the Roman poetic tradition has been a key contribution of modern scholarship. Improved understanding of the Augustans' role as a point of reference for succeeding generations of writers and readers has combined with a newly gained respect for Hellenistic literature to create a better-informed view of Seneca's literary antecedents. The new picture is quite complex, making direct appeals to fifth-century exemplars unnecessary and—ultimately—untenable. A bald assertion that, for example, "Seneca's source is Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*" now seems naive, and perhaps even a little willful.¹⁰ Yet the question of precedents, Greek and Latin, remains. It has merely grown more problematic as our understanding of the situation deepens. The familiar question of how Seneca

in Seneca's treatment." Aulus Gellius, engaged in a similar comparison using a similar method, was led to a similar conclusion about the relative merits of Caecilius and Menander (Gell. 2.23).

⁹ It is clearly the model for *Rhesus* 527–556, now widely accepted as a fourth-century play. The ode survives virtually complete in P. Berl. 9771, a third-century roll containing extracts from Euripidean plays. See Diggle 1970: 34 and Plate v. The 'Phaethon' recalled in Seneca's play probably owes more to *Metamorphoses* 2 than to Euripides. See Littlewood 2004: 107–110.

¹⁰ Calder 1976a: 28. Change was already in the air. Thus Tarrant 1976: 10: "It seems incredible that the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus could ever have been thought Seneca's model." Editors now routinely cast a wide net and represent the 'sources' of individual plays with great circumspection. The new Loeb Seneca of J.G. Fitch (2002–2004) dispenses with the detailed "comparative analyses" appended to the edition it replaces.

treats the tragic chorus, for example, reveals a new aspect when set against his predecessors' handling of that generic fixture.

Senecan choruses are notorious for their ability to disappear at will: explicitly (but inexplicably) absent at *Phaedra* 599–601, announced as coming (but never said to have gone) at *Hercules furens* 827–829. The chorus may seem, as one commentator claims, to have “no dramatic existence during the Acts” (Fitch 1987a: 333), though it does not lack dramatic function. The effect, however, is quite unlike that of fifth-century tragedy, where a chorus's presence is felt even in its silences, its dances are central to the play's impact, and its very splendor was a source of pride to its sponsor, the *choregos*, and to its trainer, the *chorodidaskalos*. On those rare occasions when Greek choruses do either leave the scene or remain despite the awkwardness of their presence, a motive for their behavior is carefully established in the text.¹¹ The theater layout at Athens clearly had something to do with these conventions: the orchestra in which the chorus performed was a large, prominent space and no less prominent when quiet or empty.¹² Though Roman tragedy kept the chorus, it did not keep the orchestra. The improvised venues of the mid-Republic had no such space available and must of necessity have altered the idea of choral performance. The later theaters built at Rome on Greek models converted the orchestra from performance space into a seating area for senators and widened the stage to accommodate the chorus as well as the actors (Vitr. 5.6.20). Either way, choral performances must have been significantly reduced in scale from what Athenian audiences experienced.

There is a hint of this in Ennius's *Medea exul* (234–236 J), where Euripides's excited dochmiacs, as Medea announces the intention to kill her children (*Med.* 1251–1260), are reduced to the more regular cretics and trochees of Roman dramatic lyric. Spectacle in the Roman theater meant parades, not choral dances: musical pyrotechnics became the province not of the chorus but of the actor.¹³ Seneca's choruses are in this respect true Roman choruses, designed to fade from view as necessary and to yield priority to the actors.

¹¹ E.g., Eur. *Hipp.* 710–724, in marked contrast to Seneca's version of this moment at *Phaed.* 599–601. Taplin 1977: 375 f. discusses five clear examples of mid-play exits in Attic tragedy. Seneca's handling of the chorus is surveyed by Tarrant 1978: 221–228, Davis 1993: 11–38.

¹² So Wiles 1997: 87: “The fifth-century spectator was never able to forget the presence of twelve or at some points fifteen bodies placed in some kind of space relationship to the actors.” The audience entered the theater through the same *parodoi* as the chorus and all but surrounded the orchestra itself.

¹³ As in Cassandra's scene of divine possession in Ennius' *Alexander*, vividly described by Cic. *div.* 1.66 f. (XVII J). Contrast the conversion of Euripides' dochmiacs as discussed by Jocelyn 1967: 369–374, and Cicero's famous description of the spectacular parades staged for the opening of Pompey's theater in 55 (Cic. *fam.* 7.1.2).

The chorus's ephemeral quality, so easily explained in Seneca's case if the plays were designed for recitation, is no less easily accommodated if we imagine not performance in the classical Greek style but a chorus sharing the stage with the actors on the Roman model.¹⁴ In another important respect, however, the function of Seneca's chorus is quite different from what that Roman model would suggest.

Choral odes divide Seneca's plays into five acts.¹⁵ This structure, an innovation of post-classical Greek drama, was eventually enshrined in later literary theory and has become so familiar a part of the western dramatic tradition that we easily forget two oddities of its history. First, the Greek choral performances that created the act breaks of Hellenistic drama were not themselves the dramatist's work: the required interludes were simply noted in the script by XOPOY or XOPOY MEΛOΣ and left to the *chorodidaskalos* to provide. Signs of this practice already appear in the last plays of Aristophanes, and by the later fourth century, comedies are regularly divided into five units (μέρη = *actus*) of structural significance. This was clearly Menander's arrangement, and the effect of this act structure on his plotting is easily observed. Similar notation is found in the remnants of post-classical tragedy and was so standard a feature that even Hellenistic revivals of fifth-century plays might alter the scripts—and cut the original choruses—to accommodate the new manner of presentation.¹⁶ Horace alludes to this style of play-making in the famous five-act "law" of the *Ars Poetica* (*neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu / fabula*), but his confident declaration ignores a second oddity of literary history: the act structure he insists upon was not a traditional Roman practice.¹⁷ The classic plays of the Roman stage, tragedies and comedies alike, were written for continuous performance. Comic poets simply eliminated the choral interludes of their

¹⁴ Marshall 2000 is a valuable demonstration of how such a chorus might work and what it can contribute to the production, even if smaller than the canonical twelve of Greek tradition. See also Davis 1993: 219–235.

¹⁵ The one exception is the unfinished (abandoned?) *Phoenissae*, which lacks choruses entirely. See Frank 1995a: 8–10.

¹⁶ For choral notations in dramatic papyri, see Hunter 1985: 35–42 (comedy), Taplin 1976, Tarrant 1978: 218–221, Jacobson 1983: 31–34 (tragedy). Signs of the coming structural change are already discernible in fifth-century texts (Hamilton 1991). For the Hellenistic evidence of anthologies and truncated revivals, see Gentili 1979: 18–31. The chorus has a long, complex (and problematic) history in the Hellenistic theater. See Sifakis 1967: 113–124, Slater 1993: 189–199.

¹⁷ Hor. *ars* 189f. A Hellenistic source (Neoptolemus of Parium?) is widely assumed but unattested. The origin of the five-act 'law' continues to be problematic. Beare 1963: 196–218 remains valuable but see also Jocelyn 1967: 18–20, Brink 1971: 248–251. The act divisions in modern texts of Plautus and Terence are a Renaissance imposition: spoken rather than musical passages may have punctuated the action of Republican plays (Marshall 2006: 203–205).

models: finding those places in the text where they papered over the act breaks of their originals is fundamental to analytic criticism. Tragic poets, by taking responsibility for their own choral lyrics, seem to have returned to something more like fifth-century dramatic practice. In adopting the Hellenistic convention of act division, Seneca is clearly separating himself from his Republican predecessors and aligning himself with ... well, with what?

Augustan models immediately come to mind. Seneca seems unlikely to have looked directly to Hellenistic exemplars, while the plays of Varius and Ovid had become enduring, influential landmarks of the period.¹⁸ Yet Varius and Ovid, though in all respects serious and prominent poets, were only incidental tragedians and therefore more likely to draw upon the literary principles represented by Horace than the practical conventions that had shaped the work of Accius. The five-act structure, like the shift from iambic senarius to trimeter (Strzelecki 1953: 162 f.), may have been among their gifts to the Roman tragic tradition. That is necessarily a speculation: Augustan tragedy and its putative legacy are today little more than shadows. Yet the willingness of such major poets to experiment with tragic drama also recalls the fact of tragedy's evolving history in Rome, and with that recollection comes one last, important question: what did "tragedy" mean to Romans of Seneca's class in Seneca's generation?

That question takes us even farther from the world of fifth-century Athens. Ennius and Euripides both wrote for public performances at public festivals. Differences between them pale beside the physical, social, and formal differences separating Senecan tragedy from Euripides. Charles Segal portrays the contrast with characteristic vividness: "Like the architecture of the theater itself, cut into the hillside and open to the sky, Greek tragedy is a public, outward-facing form. Seneca's tragedies were produced for a relatively small coterie [...]. Whether intended to be acted or recited, his plays are realized in more or less private circumstances, and they face inward" (Segal 1986: 4). What is and is not "Greek" in Senecan tragedy has much to do with that inward turn, but tracing its consequences means going back to the history of what becomes post-professional tragedy in Rome at the end of the Republic.

In the course of the first century BC, even as the elite were becoming more widely and unapologetically bilingual than ever before, Roman tragedy slipped free of immediate comparison to ostensible Greek originals. For Cicero, the newly minted classics of the Roman stage had clearly secured

¹⁸ Tarrant 1978: 258–261. Seneca's prose reveals no echoes of Hellenistic tragedy (Mazzoli 1970: 179–181), though these would of course be difficult to recognize.

primacy over their models in the Roman imagination. Who, he asks in polemic mode, would prefer reading Euripides's *Medea* to Ennius's play?¹⁹ The *Palatina Medea* he laughs to scorn at *Pro Caelio* 18 explicitly recalls Ennius, not Euripides, and so does the Pelian grove of Catullus 64.²⁰ Nor are the references to tragedy in Latin exclusively bookish. Cicero famously claimed that the ideal orator required the voice of the tragic actor (*vox tragoedorum: de orat.* 1.128), and when he goes on to develop that claim, his illustrations are all drawn from the Roman tradition of stage performance (*de orat.* 3.216–219). That aspect of the tragic legacy clearly did not endure. Rhetorical writers of the next century are more likely to adduce comic illustrations to make analogous points, an indication of tragedy's diminished presence on the public stage.²¹ It was supplanted in the popular imagination by pantomime and other, less respectable, entertainments (cf. *Ov. trist.* 2.497 f.), and by the time of Augustus, the writing of tragedy had ceased to be a professional activity. Accius (d. ca. 86 BC) was the last professional tragedian. This did not mean, however, that elite Romans lost interest in tragedy. Their interest simply became more private and more literary.

Tragedy had long been an aristocratic amusement among men of education: Quintus Cicero, on garrison duty in Gaul, once passed away idle hours by composing four tragedies in just over two weeks.²² But poetic careers were not always so entirely incidental. Julius Caesar Strabo, an orator of note (and one of Cicero's interlocutors in *De oratore*), took his composition of tragedies seriously enough to attend meetings of the poets' guild, the Collegium Poetarum, in Accius's presence. (Val. Max. 3.7.11 says that Accius was unimpressed.) Asinius Pollio's tragedies won the respect of Virgil (*eccl.* 8.9 with Serv. ad loc.) and Horace (*carm.* 2.1.9–12), though it is striking that Pollio presented them only in private venues, where authors could engage directly with audiences of their peers. So, with one famous exception, did those two other exemplars

¹⁹ Cic. *fin.* 1.4: *Quis enim tam inimicus paene nomini Romano est, qui Enni Medeam aut Antiopam Pacuvi spernat aut reiciat, quod se isdem Euripidi fabulis delectari dicat, Latinas litteras oderit?* Quint. 10.1.98 finds Varius' *Thyestes* equal to any Greek work.

²⁰ Catullus' recollection of earlier Latin tragedy (and not epic) is analyzed by Thomas 1982. Augustans, too, readily recall Republican drama directly (e.g., Hor. *sat.* 2.3.259–271, echoing Ter. *Eun.* 46–49, 57–73), though later on Pers. 5.16–18 looks back instead to the Menandrian original.

²¹ Quintilian's pairing of Roscius and Aesopus is of course secondhand (11.3.111). Examples drawn from his own experience are *comoedoi*, e.g., Demetrius and Stratocles (11.3.178–181). The role of actors in rhetorical training is summarized by Fantham 2002.

²² Cic. *Q. fr.* 3.5.7. The *Oedipus* attested for Caesar (Suet. *Iul.* 6.7) and *Ajax* of Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 86) were no doubt comparable exercises. For the history of Roman tragedy between Accius and Seneca, see Fantham 1996: 145–152, Goldberg 1996: 270–275.

of Augustan tragedy, Varius and Ovid. Varius's *Thyestes* was produced to great acclaim—and an extraordinary fee—at the Actian Games of 29 BC, but he does not seem to have repeated that public experiment. His only other documented brush with tragedy came at a recitation among friends, and we know that Ovid's sole foray into tragic form, *Medea*, was never produced.²³

Pollio's notorious distaste for public audiences seems to have encouraged a fashion for recitation and private circulation among aristocratic authors and their peers (Sen. *contr.* 4 pr. 2). The *Atreus* that fanned Tiberius's suspicions of Mamercus Scaurus in 34 BC was a book (Tac. *ann.* 6.29.4 f., Suet. *Tib.* 61), while the one public presentation attested for Pomponius Secundus, a man of consular rank whose peers honored his tragedies as much as his public service, was a disaster.²⁴ The crowd on that occasion insulted him so badly that Claudius, outraged by their disrespect, took steps to curb the growing license of theatrical audiences. The show in question was not certainly the performance of a complete tragedy. Poems were sometimes appropriated for use in pantomimes, and the *carmina* of Tacitus's report might well refer to that or to some similar dramatization of choral extracts.²⁵ Nor was the crowd's behavior exceptional. Its effect on a man of Secundus's high standing, however, is easily imagined. Small wonder, then, that private recitation is what Tacitus envisions for Curiatius Maternus, whose politically charged readings of his *Cato* and *Thyestes* before an audience of friends sets the scene for the *Dialogus de oratoribus*.²⁶

That example is of course a fiction, but Seneca can be placed in precisely such a gathering, and some of the literary talk on that occasion is easily imagined. The source is a passing reference in Quintilian (*inst.* 8.3.31). While illustrating how poorly Romans tolerate neologisms, Quintilian indulges in a

²³ That is the clear implication of Ov. *trist.* 5.7.27. Varius recited as his own composition a tragedy that Vergil had given his wife (Serv. ad *ecl.* 3.20). Other tragic lines are ascribed to him, but the attribution is uncertain. See Lefèvre 1976: 10–12.

²⁴ Tac. *ann.* 12.28 values Secundus' *carminum gloria* even above his triumphal honors. Cf. Plin. *nat.* 13.83 (*vatem civemque clarissimum*) and Quint. 10.1.98 (*eorum quos viderim longe principes*).

²⁵ Tac. *ann.* 11.13.1, of an audience in 47: *in Publium Pomponium consularem (is carmina scaenae dabat) probra iecerat*. The imperfect tense suggests an event ongoing when the outrage occurred, not a practice of regular stage performance, and the emphasis is clearly on Secundus' social position. The offense was to rank, not to art. For the adaptation of poems for theatrical performance see Ov. *trist.* 5.7.25–28, Vita Verg. 23 (*ecl.*), and the curious story of Cytheris at Serv. ad *ecl.* 6.11.

²⁶ Tac. *dial.* 2 f. The easy pairing suggests no functional difference by this time between the technically distinct genres of *praetexta* and tragedy, while Maternus' defense of poetry as an aristocratic occupation implies none between 'plays' and other forms of poetry. Cf. Fantham 1996: 211–221 on the salon-culture that Tacitus knew.

brief recollection: "I remember when I was still quite young there was a debate between Pomponius Secundus and Seneca even in their introductions about whether '*gradus eliminat*' was appropriate diction for tragedy." The anecdote is most frequently adduced as the one chronological marker in Seneca's otherwise shadowy career as a tragedian, since Quintilian's phrase *iuvenis admodum* suggests a date in the early 50s for this gathering.²⁷ Additional lessons, however, may be taken from it. The occasion was almost certainly private. The *praeefationes* in question were probably incidental remarks made before the readings, the sort of introductions Pliny knew (*epist.* 1.13.2) rather than formal prologues of the kind Terence wrote two centuries earlier to defend himself against the attacks of Luscius Lanuvinus. The debate itself is striking for its literary, textual, and narrowly Latin focus. Terence, the professional, had addressed issues of dramatic technique, stage action, and the very business of playwriting. Secundus and Seneca consider a much smaller question. The verb *eliminare* "to cross the threshold" is attested for all three Republican tragedians, but it does not appear in any Senecan play. The phrase (and thus its defense) must lie with Secundus, an explanation consistent with both Seneca's known distaste for Republican poetry and Secundus's extensive antiquarian interests.²⁸

A debate like this over diction rather than dramatic technique is precisely what we would expect to preoccupy first-century Romans like Secundus and Seneca. The question of *eliminare* gets to the heart of what made tragedy "tragic" for them and their audiences, as is clear from Quintilian's own judgment on the Roman record in tragedy (10.1.97 f.):

Tragoediae scriptores veterum Accius atque Pacuvius clarissimi gravitate sententiarum, verborum pondere, auctoritate personarum. Ceterum nitor et summa in excolendis operibus manus magis videri potest temporibus quam ipsis defuisse: virium tamen Accio plus tribuitur, Pacuvium videri doctiorem qui esse docti adfectant volunt. Iam Vari Thyestes cuilibet Graecarum comparari potest. Ovidi Medea videtur mihi ostendere quantum ille vir praestare potuerit si ingenio suo imperare quam indulgere maluisset.

²⁷ Quint. 8.3.31: *nam memini iuvenis admodum inter Pomponium Secundum ac Senecam etiam praeefationibus esse tractatum an 'gradus eliminat' in tragoedia dici oportuisset*. Secundus vanishes from the record after 51: Tac. *ann.* 12.28 may be a veiled obituary. For this episode, Cichorius 1922: 426–429 is basic, supplemented now by Fitch 1987a: 50f. and Tarrant 1995: 220–222.

²⁸ Quint. 10.1.98 remarks particularly on his *eruditio*; some of his linguistic quirks caught the attention of later grammarians (Cichorius 1922: 423–425). Secundus possessed original documents in the hands of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, a rarity that greatly impressed the elder Pliny when he saw them (*nat.* 1.83). Seneca's dislike of early Latin poetry is documented by Mazzoli 1970: 182–187.

As for writers of tragedy, of the ancients Accius and Pacuvius are most outstanding for seriousness of thought, weightiness of diction, conviction of characterizations. What they lack in polish and in applying the final touch for perfecting works may be attributed more to their times than to themselves. Accius is given more credit for force. Those who claim to be learned like to think Pacuvius the more learned of the two. Varius's *Thyestes* can be compared to any play of the Greeks. Ovid's *Medea* seems to me to show what that man could have achieved had he preferred to control rather than to indulge his talent.

The virtues here are all virtues of text. Although Quintilian's catalogue focuses on reading and what reading teaches, the specifically textual virtues of *gravitas*, *pondus*, *nitor*, and *vis* reflect the broadly rhetorical mindset of the age. The extra attention paid to Accius and Pacuvius also reflects its inherent conservatism, as does the praise accorded Ovid's *Medea*: the *ingenium* Quintilian delights to find curbed in that work was the same Ovidian innovation and daring we count among his most distinctive merits.²⁹ Their absence from the play is quite striking. Tragedy, at least the tragedy Quintilian approved, must have been a conservative genre, which brings us back to Seneca and Secundus.

The point at issue between them was not simply the appearance of an odd or unexpected word. That alone was no fault. A line survives from one of Secundus's tragedies, in which he uses *chelys* (tortoise) to mean "lyre" (8R), a metonymy attested for the first time only in the post-Ovidian *Heroides* 15 (181) and one that clearly appealed to Seneca, who then used it twice himself (*trist.* 321, *Ag.* 331). The problem with *eliminare* is not simply that it is rare, but that it is both rare and old. The verb was a Republican coinage used specifically by tragedians to heighten their diction for an effect not found in their models: both Ennius's *extra aedis* [...] *eliminat* (*Medea exul* 238, cf. Eur. *Med.* 50f.: *πρὸς πύλαισι* [...] *ἔσθηκας*) and Accius's *elimina urbe* (*Phoenissae* 592, cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 593: *τῶνδ' ἔξω κομίζου τειχέων*) replace an unexceptional word with this unexpected one.³⁰ At issue between Seneca and Secundus is the Roman poets' relationship to those Roman predecessors and to Roman poetic traditions, not Greek ones, and, in hindsight, it is easy enough to see who prevailed in their debate. The only tragedies to survive from this (or any

²⁹ Quintilian's left-handed praise here of Ovid is of a piece with his subsequent praise of Seneca: *multa etiam admiranda sunt, eligere modo curae sit; quod utinam ipse fecisset* (10.1.131). Quintilian saw indulgence and license where in hindsight we see modernity.

³⁰ For the connotations of the verb, see Jocelyn 1967: 377 f. If Accius 592 (*egredere exi ecfer te, elimina urbe*) does in fact lie behind Cic. *Cat.* 1.10, it may be significant that Cicero contented himself with *egredere ex urbe*. Seneca does not avoid archaisms, but they tend to be familiar ones. Cf. Tarrant 1976 ad *Ag.* 305 (*aerumna*) and 582 (*altisonus*).

other) period of Roman literature are the very ones so conspicuously absent from Quintilian's admiring catalogue.³¹

Yet Seneca's exclusion from the company of Roman tragedians is not merely a quirk of ancient taste or of Quintilian's personal conservatism. Modern critics, too, have found the plays difficult to place by genre or tradition. An author so steeped in the "classics" of his time and whose experiments with tragedy probably extended over many years will not be easily categorized, but the firmer our grasp of these realities, the more problematic correct placement of his tragedies becomes.³² The immediate interpretive gains, however valuable in their own right, have brought in their wake significant methodological challenges. Not only have we learned to appreciate the richness of Seneca's poetic texture, but we have done so by discovering that analytic techniques honed on Augustan verse—the recognition of intertextual relationships and the poets' continuous negotiation with predecessors and readers alike—work equally well on these post-Augustan tragedies.³³ The discovery has brought them into the literary mainstream, but has in the process pulled them ever further from the Greek world and from the dramatic tradition. Attic tragedy can also be allusive, but rarely in the same way. What Seneca knew about allusion, both how to allude and what is gained by doing so, was not learned from the study of Greek drama. The "correction" of Aeschylus by Euripides's *Electra*, as she dismisses the recognition tokens of *Choephoroi*, as contrived and improbable is quite different in point and perception from what encourages Seneca's *Phaedra* to be understood as a meditation or commentary on Euripides's *Hippolytus*. Greek audiences are invited to recall what they have seen. Romans are asked to recall what they have read.³⁴ The difference puts students of Seneca at a hermeneutic crossroads that Hellenists have managed to avoid.

³¹ His praise of Secundus (*eorum quos viderim*: 10.1.98) sounds like a deliberate snub of Seneca, though Pollio too is missing from the survey. Whether Seneca's *poemata* mentioned at 10.1.129 are meant to include the tragedies is unclear, though Quintilian obviously knew them: at 9.2.9 he quotes *Med.* 453 without comment.

³² Töchterle 1994: 22–29 is especially good on the problem of genre. The fact that only *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* may, strictly speaking, be Neronian does not make the question any easier. For dating, see the implications of Fitch 1981 and Marshall, *supra*, pp. 37–41.

³³ So Schiesaro 2003: 2: "The primary aim of this book is to subject Seneca to the same kinds of sustained literary analysis as is now taken for granted for other major Latin authors." Segal 1986 already does something similar. The ramifications of an intertextual approach to Seneca are addressed by Schiesaro 2003: 221–228.

³⁴ The relationship of Eur. *El.* 518–546 to Aischyl. *Choeph.* 225–234 is much discussed: a recent revival of the *Oresteia*, not a forty year-old memory, probably underlies Euripides' allusion. See Davies 1998, and for the dramatic point of the recollection, Halporn 1983. Behind

The modern study of Greek tragedy, however fractured by the rival claims of poetry, performance, and polis to scholarly attention, can draw upon ample stores of evidence to sustain simultaneous, if not always harmonious, investigations in all three directions. Latinists, who confront Senecan tragedy without either the external evidence to support historically informed performance criticism or even basic details of its audiences and occasions, face a more limited range of investigative options.³⁵ Only the text is certain, and as students of text dig ever deeper into its complexities, they find dramatic speculations distracting and unhelpful. Where Hellenists routinely accept, though sometimes only grudgingly, the relevance of performance to their interpretive strategies, the very identification of Seneca's tragedies as plays is now often claimed as a liability in the progress of their study.³⁶ That is not the kind of claim scholars of Euripides are likely to make. How long it survives among Latinists remains to be seen. Whether students of drama and students of poetry are on their way to a reconciliation at some higher level of understanding or only to a deeper level of conflict remains to be seen, but this is for the moment the Latinists' internal debate. The Greek elements (and the dramatic elements) that inform Seneca's achievement will surely be called to re-enter the discussion at some point, but the cue for their return has yet to be given.

the differences of Segal 1986: 202–214 and Littlewood 2004: 259–301 in their treatment of *Phaedra* lies a shared commitment to its explication as poetry, not play.

³⁵ Thus the methodology of performance criticism outlined by Marshall 2000: 45–48 in the context of Senecan tragedy adduces Greek, not Roman, tragic examples. Arguments for Seneca's stageworthiness must work from the possible and are essentially ahistorical.

³⁶ So Littlewood 2004: 2: "I think that we continue to underestimate how open Senecan tragedy is to the influence of non-dramatic Latin literature and that its generic identity as drama narrows our perspective undesirably." Tarrant 1995: 216 notes the "unfortunate consequence of treating Senecan tragedy primarily as an episode in the history of ancient drama". Contrast the ongoing debates among Hellenists represented by, e.g., Goldhill 1993, Wiles 1997: 5–14, Rhodes 2003.

PHILOSOPHICAL TRAGEDY?

François-Régis Chaumartin

1. GENESIS OF A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH OF TRAGEDY

1.1. *Mythology*

Greeks expressed in mythology their views about the origin of the universe, about the birth and evolution of the human race, but also their impulses: on the one hand, violent and death-carrying impulses, bearing adultery, incest, patricide, and infanticide, and, on the other hand, generous impulses to remove calamities, to defend the weak in jeopardy. Thus accounts arose, elaborated in the course of time by the oral tradition, about the Atrides, the Labdacides, Medea, Alcestis, or Hercules.

1.2. *Tragedy*

In the fifth century, after epic poetry had made the deeds of these accounts a subject of narration, tragedy made them the subject of performances, not without plenty of innovations. On the one hand, there were Aeschylus's trilogy about Agamemnon and his family, Sophocles's *Oedipus*, Euripides's *Medea*, and on the other hand, *Alcestis* and *Heracles* by the same poet. But tragic poets also put in their plays digressions and maxims, uttered by characters or, more generally, by the chorus, in which they expressed thoughts about the human condition, critical examinations of political power, rules for leading one's life. These views might come from the author himself, from the heritage of common opinion or, in the case of Euripides, from philosophical doctrines.

1.3. *Philosophy*

Socrates's philosophy and that of the schools he engendered, gave pre-eminence to knowing oneself, to exploring the soul in its own constitution and in its relations with the body, and to studying the mechanism of passions in order to find the best way to live life. In doing so, philosophy saw tragedy as a means to illustrate its own purposes, and even as a source of inspiration. For

the tragic poets had imbued mythology with knowledge's higher penetration and with poetry's incantation. Thus, in Plato's *Symposium* (179c–d), it belongs to Phaedrus, the guest who defined the theme of the oratory contest, to praise love. He claims that love is great because it might lead to the highest degree of beauty, namely to give one's own life to save another being. He quotes, as an example, Alcestis, whose conduct is so magnificently described by Euripides. Fénelon remembered this, when he claimed that the pagans knew complete unselfishness, a necessary condition for pure love.¹

In the old Stoa, Cleanthes already claims that, because of the strict constraint of the meter, poetry expresses thought more vividly than prose. By saying this, he glorifies the moral maxims of epic, didactic and lyric poetry, and of theater, comedy, and tragedy.²

Chrysippus, the second founder of Stoicism, most clearly illustrates the close connection between tragedy and philosophy. According to Diogenes Laertius (7.180), "[...] in one of his treatises he copied out nearly the whole of Euripides' *Medea*, and someone who had taken up the volume, being asked what he was reading, replied 'The *Medea* of Chrysippus'" (translation by Hinks 1958). This seems to mean that, for the philosopher, this tragedy illustrated so perfectly his own theory of passion that he felt he had written it himself. For him, the play supported his own ethics very well by its apotropaic function: by depicting the calamities arising from passion,³ even with their direst consequences, it was able to prevent the spectator or the reader from assenting to passion. Thus, vices were hindered from arising and growing.

Chrysippus was strongly interested in Euripides's *Medea*, because this play suited his monist conception of the soul and, consequently, his definition of passion as an error of judgment favored by some corporal dispositions. One consequence of this error is a failure to recognize true freedom. Unlike Plato, for Chrysippus a passion is not a struggle between two parts of the soul, one rational, the other irrational, but an oscillation—inside the soul itself, conceived as one and indivisible—between two opposite directions. Sometimes the soul, remaining equal to itself, preserves the rightness of its choices, as imposed by its natural orientation to the good. Sometimes, moved by a too-violent impulse, having root in some bodily disposition,

¹ Fénelon, *Instructions et avis sur divers points [...] de la perfection chrétienne [...]*, quoted from Gouhier 1977: 1.

² Cf. Sen. *epist.* 108.10; Cleanthes occasionally quoted Homer and Euripides (Diog. Laert. 7.172).

³ This deadly characteristic of passion is described by Medea herself: "passion, which is cause of direst ills to men" (1080).

namely the excessive ardor of a temperament, it comes to the point of choosing external things. If the strength of this impulse prevails, if it breaks away like a wave, the soul wholly shifts: it is no longer the seat of reason but of passion and consequently an inescapable series of calamities arises, such as monstrous actions, serial crimes, or suicides. Actually, everything depends on an initial error of judgment made by the individual, who attributes to external things a value that they do not possess and uses them as a guide for his conduct.⁴ Then, he becomes a slave to them and loses the one and only true freedom, that of assenting to the will of God, who determines the destiny of men.⁵ Two passages of Euripides's *Medea* answered perfectly Chrysippus's monist reading. In lines 108–110, fearing the actions of Medea, who was angered by the perfidy of Jason, the nurse qualifies her mistress as *μεγάλοςπλαγχνος* (“who has inflated *viscera*”). For a Stoic philosopher, this *viscera* might be only the heart, seat of the soul, that became more active and made of Medea an exceptional wife.⁶ Furthermore, in lines 1078–1080, Medea herself claims: “I realize what evil I am about to do, but passion is stronger than my sound considerations, that passion which is cause of direst ills to men.”⁷ Because of the hyperactivity of her soul, she sees, with complete lucidity,⁸ the horror and the dire consequences of the actions she is about to perform, but this hyperactivity goes too far, drawing her in the opposite direction, to passion, creator of the crimes that she wishes to avoid. Epictetus, whose relationship with the Stoa's founders is well-known, certainly refers to Chrysippus's teaching, when he explains that Medea, by her own conduct, was seduced away from true freedom:

⁴ See, in particular, Nussbaum 1987: 129–158; Nussbaum 1993a: 97–149, principally 142, 147; Nussbaum 1993b: 307–344, above all 313–315; Pigeaud 1981: 376–403.

⁵ Epict. *diatr.* 2.17.17–22.

⁶ Pigeaud 1981: 376.

⁷ These lines may not be exactly translated into a modern language, because some words are ambiguous. For instance, *κακά* are Medea's evils, actually her crimes; but they could also refer to the calamities that might follow; *θυμός* is both Medea's anger and her desire to take revenge—anger and revenge belonging to passion; *βουλευματα* might be either the sound considerations advised to Medea by her reason or her plans to take revenge. If, as in Diller 1966: 367, *βουλευματα* is interpreted in this way, referring to lines 372, 769, 772, 1044, 1048, line 1079 has to be translated as follows: “my passion controls my plans, it is master of them.”

⁸ Medea evidently does not possess pure reason, that harmony with the rational principle leading the universe, which is the privilege of the wise man. She possesses, rather, an exceptionally developed part of reason consistent with the condition of common men. Medea uses it to help herself get revenge and she perceives, with complete lucidity, that she loses her self-control, falling into irremediable disarray. See Christopher 1983: 136 ff., particularly 142 f.

"I want something, and it does not happen [...] I do not want something, and it does happen." [...] Medea [...], because she would not endure this, came to the point of killing her children. For she had the proper conception of what it means for anyone's wishes not to come true [...] "Very well then," says she, "in these circumstances [...] I shall take vengeance upon the man who has wronged and insulted me [...] I kill my children" [...] She did not know where the power lies to do what we wish—that we cannot get this from outside ourselves, nor by disturbing and deranging things [...] in a word, give up wanting anything but what God wants.⁹

Moreover, the idea, expressed by Epictetus, that the tragedy's spectators might be seduced by false values, almost certainly originates from the first masters and more probably from Chrysippus. These false values are namely the so-called external goods. The spectators are seduced by them, seeing the reverses of fortune sustained by the leading characters, kings, or tyrants, moved from the highest power and the greatest wealth to shame and need, Oedipus being the best example of this reversal.¹⁰

Since the Stoics, like the Cynics, highly esteemed Hercules, it might well be supposed that for Chrysippus, the play of which he is the eponymous hero, praised virtues beloved by the Stoa. Thus, Euripides otherwise supported the Stoic ethics, not by steering clear of vice but by inciting to virtue. His theater, therefore, in addition to the apotropaic function assumed a parenetic function. In the tragedy named for him, Hercules is no longer the bloodthirsty character of Homeric epics, but, according to a tradition arising in lyric poetry of the sixth century, a pacifier and beneficent hero. The fit of madness and the children's murder are no longer placed before the Labors, as in the earlier accounts of the myth, but after them; so they are no longer an expiation imposed by Eurystheus (even if they always answer Hera's purpose) but, on the one hand, a spontaneous act of filial piety in order to cleanse Amphitryon of Electryon's murder, and, on the other hand, a proof of his love to mankind by delivering the earth from its monsters and making it habitable. The murder of Lycus and of his friends is due to the crimes of this usurper, who is about to perpetrate other, even more horrible, crimes.

The fit of madness and its consequences are borrowed from epic accounts, but Euripides gives them a new meaning: they no longer depreciate but magnify the hero, who becomes able, with the help of Theseus, to overcome a trial that might arise from several sources, namely the personal action of a goddess, helped by her attendants; a hereditary curse; or an assault

⁹ Epict. *diatr.* 2.17.18–22 (translation by Oldfather).

¹⁰ Epict. *diatr.* 1.24.16–18; 1.4.23–30.

from doom. This conquest of an aptitude for overcoming life's most painful circumstances with the help of a friend to whom one is devoted, might be easily explained in the words of the Stoa: it is an anticipated hymn to praise magnanimity and friendship as understood by the Stoa. Whereas Theseus, the helpful friend, recommends, like Phaedra's nurse in *Hippolytus*, resigning oneself to passions and calamities, which might touch gods as they do men, Hercules denies this anthropomorphic conception of divinity and devotes himself to lucidly accepting and overcoming trials imposed by fate, an attitude that fundamentally belongs to *magnitudo animi*.

All this is confirmed by Strabo: referring to the Stoics, he thinks that epic poets and dramatists must teach ethics, not only by their words, but also by the very plot of a play, with this double apotropaic and parenetic function. It belongs to poetry to, on the one hand, steer the audience from vice by fear, and, on the other hand, to give them a love of virtue, inciting them to imitation of exemplary heroes.¹¹

2. PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH OF SENECA'S TRAGEDIES

2.1. Senecan Orientations

In a passage of Epistle 108, Seneca, clearly following Cleanthes, says that the theater may help to teach the audience morally with maxims in well-written lines, catching their attention and impressing them (8–10). The Roman does it by referring to the comic poet Publilius Syrus; but we may think that he gave the same pedagogical function to his own tragedies, because he carefully notes that the philosopher is able, thanks to poetry, to more effectively and vividly express his thought: [...] *cum a philosopho ista dicuntur* ("when such things are uttered by a philosopher"), *cum salutaribus praeceptis versus inseruntur, efficacius eadem illa demissuri in animum imperitorum*.

Working on the souls of those who are not experts in philosophy, tragedy helps to teach them morally, as philosophy does, on a different level but with the same purposes. Like philosophy, tragedy must be do away with empty subtleties and the verbiage of dialectics; for, as Euripides says, evoked here by Seneca: "the language of truth is simple" (*veritatis simplex oratio est: epist. 49.12*). Like that of the epics, as we can see in the example of Ulysses in the *Odyssey*, the true role of tragedy is to lead to virtues (*hoc me doce, quomodo patriam amem, quomodo uxorem, quomodo patrem, quomodo*

¹¹ Strab. *geogr.* 1.2.f.

ad haec tam honesta vel naufragus navigem [...]. doce me quid sit pudicitia: epist. 88.7), which in turn lead to wisdom, which may free the soul (*unum studium vere liberale est quod liberum facit, hoc est sapientiae: epist. 88.2*). If epics and tragedy do not assign themselves the purpose of drawing moral lessons from mythological accounts, these accounts run the risk of becoming a school of vices, as can happen in lyrics (*inde etiam poetarum furor fabulis humanos errores alentium quibus visus est Iuppiter voluptate concubitus delentis duplicasse noctem: quid aliud est vitia nostra incendere quam auctores illis inscribere deos: dial. 10 [= brev.].16.4*). The philosopher himself is not sheltered from such a danger if his sole desire is to speak eloquently in order to charm people, and if the only desire of people is to take pleasure in listening to him (*quidam veniunt ut audiant non ut discant, sicut in theatrum voluptatis causa ad delectandas aures oratione vel voce vel fabulis ducimur [...]: epist. 108.6*). The spectator of tragedy, because he bears in himself, as does every man, the seed of virtue (*virtutum semen: epist. 108.8*) requires, by a natural impulse, the punishment of vice. Once more quoting Euripides, Seneca expresses it in a funny way (*epist. 115.12*): as the audience wanted to expel from the stage an actor who had just recited lines praising money and greed, the poet jumped on the stage asking them to wait for the conclusion and to watch the castigation that was in store for Bellerophon, the character in question.

2.2. *What Do These Orientations Mean?*

From the data given by his works in prose, we would expect that Seneca, following Euripides but going further, according to his Stoicism, filled his own tragedies with maxims, giving them the same apotropaic and parenetic function that he does in his philosophical works. It should be noted that the purpose of this philosophical teaching is Stoic and that, in terms of doctrine, Seneca might not be considered a follower of eclecticism. In this connection, some expressions recently uttered by J. Dangel (“même dans sa prose philosophique, Sénèque reste éclectique, réfléchissant aussi bien sur le stoïcisme que sur l’épicurisme”) and by H. Hine (“Seneca’s philosophical prose is eclectic combining Epicurean elements with Stoic”¹²) might be misleading. Of course, Seneca often introduces Epicurean elements in his tracts and *Epistles*, but he always does so with parenetic purposes. This is particularly striking in the *Epistles*: in order to lead Lucilius, Epicureanism’s

¹² In the discussion following Hine 2004: 212 f.

follower, to Stoicism, the philosopher emphasizes the points of agreement between both doctrines in the first thirty-three epistles. Seneca sometimes seems to think, and in this he differs greatly from eclecticism, that, as their opponents, the Stoics are unable to correct, by the power of reasoning, mistakes that have become dogma over the course of time (for example, that death is an evil). The Roman gladly mocks their syllogisms, which pitifully reveal how weak human reason is.¹³ On the other hand, J. Dangel is right when she says that “la philosophie—système théorique—ne fonctionne pas comme telle dans les tragédies de Sénèque.” If Seneca had actually wanted to explain the Stoic system using poetry, he would have written a kind of *Anti-Lucretius*. Thus, B. Marti is mistaken in seeing in the order of plays given by the *Etruscus* a series of chapters of a Stoic book.¹⁴

So, why did Seneca choose the tragedy as a means of poetic expression? Tragedy gave him an image of world and man that radically differed from that of the Stoics.¹⁵ Instead of God—rational mainspring, fate, and providence—who has built the world for man’s sake and subjected him to trials only in order to allow him to obtain virtues, by which he might become able to be identified with God himself, we find malevolent divinities that lead him to passions, sources of death and destruction. Instead being born with the seed of virtues, which are destined to become wisdom, man is born with a hereditary curse, by which he is doomed, even before his birth, to imitate murderous and ravaging behavior.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in Stoicism itself, where wisdom seems to be an inaccessible ideal, are not most men, marked by heredity and deficiencies of education, from the outset, doomed to mistakes and to the servitude of passions? May it not so happen that they call into question the existence of divine providence and world order, believing themselves to be deserted by heaven, deaf to their prayers?

Moreover, tragedy gave the philosopher the opportunity to introduce discussions between characters and express contradictory thoughts about the most different matters, from practicing political power (*Oedipus*) to choosing a way of life (*Phaedra*). As for the chorus, the Roman chose not to make them his spokesmen or assign them a didactic function. For him they represent, rather, common men, following the tragic action’s course and frequently referring to philosophical thoughts, which may belong to either philosophical

¹³ Chaumartin 1997.

¹⁴ Marti 1945.

¹⁵ Dingel 1974.

¹⁶ In *Agamemnon*, Seneca makes perceptible more strongly than his Greek predecessors the curse striking Aegisthes. See Marchese 2005: 109–157.

school but fall generally in the sphere of common sense. However, Seneca sometimes used the chorus to express specifically Stoic thoughts.

2.3. *The Quest for sententiae*

Actually, in *diverbia*, as in *cantica*, there are plenty of *sententiae*; and probably right from the beginning collections (*excerpta*) have been made, from which instructors might take quotations, in order to confirm what they were teaching. St. Augustin doubtless did so, as we might think, if we consider with which common expressions he introduces two *sententiae*, taken from Seneca's tragedies: in *Contra Faustum* (20.8) *unde quidam eorum tragicus ait: "deum esse amorem turpis et vitio favens / finxit libido"* (*Phaedr.* 195 f.) and in a *Sermon* (*Coll. Morin*, p. 231, 10) *ait quidam: "qui non vetat peccare, cum possit, iubet"* (*Tro.* 291).¹⁷

Whatever the case may be, during the Middle Ages and well beyond, there were a lot of *excerpta*, indifferently taking quotations from the tragedies and the prose works. From this we may conclude that they provided an abundance of subject matter for moral teaching. It is without doubt from a collection of this kind that Descartes borrowed, in order to devise his motto, these three lines from a chorus of *Thyestes* (*illi mors gravis incubat / qui notus nimis omnibus, / ignotus moritur sibi*: 400–402). This shows how much it is necessary for men to know themselves.¹⁸

2.4. *Plays with Apotropaic Intention*

Seneca, by all appearances, wrote four plays of his corpus¹⁹ (*Phaedra*, *Medea*, *Thyestes*, *Agamemnon*) with the purpose of seducing the spectator or the reader away from passion by throwing its disastrous consequences into relief. Moreover, when he describes how passion is born and develops we may easily find that there are Stoic manners of scrutinizing things, at least if we sufficiently know the doctrine; for these manners are not perceptible and there is not at all—it must be emphasized—a didactic account of a thesis.

When, in the first stage of the play, *Phaedra* comes to meet her nurse, she reveals that she feels a pain, born of her guilty love for Hippolytus. She assigns

¹⁷ Bocciolini Palagi 1978b.

¹⁸ For Descartes, this knowledge of himself ought to lead to God's knowledge (*noverim me, noverim te*: Aug. *soliloq.* 2.1.1). See Lewis 1985.

¹⁹ From the traditional corpus of Seneca's tragedies I have excluded *Octavia*, which was certainly not written by Seneca; *Hercules Oetaeus*, which was probably not; and *Phoenissae*, which is too mutilated.

the roots of this love to the curse of Venus against the descent of the Sun. In the nurse's answer, several elements belonging to Stoicism are evident. According to the Stoics,²⁰ the root of love is the image impressed on one human being by the bodily beauty of another, with whom he consequently desires to copulate. If he who has been impressed by that image removes it from himself, he becomes free from the desire. If, on the contrary, he assents to it, passion takes the place of his reason and he becomes entirely consumed by passion (130–135). On his own responsibility, every human being allows the passion to settle in him and take leadership; it is in order to escape from his responsibility that he gave it to the god Love (195–197). The words uttered a little before by Phaedra (*quae memoras*—the way of the good—*scio / vera esse, nutrix, sed furor cogit sequi / peiora*, 177–179) recall Euripides, whom Ovidius remembered (*video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor: met. 7.20 f.*). The following words (*vadit animus in praeceps sciens / remeatque frustra sana consilia appetens: 179 f.*) perfectly express the oscillation of the soul conceived of by Stoic monism and the irresistibility of passion, like a wave of the sea. And passion continues working. If Phaedra expresses the wish to die (*morte praevertam nefas: 254*), it is not to be understood, according to Stoic doctrine, as the only possible means of escaping from an intolerable state, as she seems herself to suggest (*non omnis animo cessit ingenuo pudor: 250*), but rather as blackmailing the nurse. When she takes her own life, near the scattered limbs of the young prince (1197 f.), in spite of her desire for purification, Phaedra accomplishes the unity of their bodies in death, which she could not do in life. So passion achieved its task of destruction to the very end.

In *Agamemnon*, *Medea*, and *Thyestes*, vengeance is the passion that generates dramatic action. According to the Stoics, this passion originates from the image of an endured wrong, which one has assented to, and it has the same ravaging effects as the others. From the outset of her dialogue with the nurse—the dramatic technique is the same as in *Phaedra*—Clytemnestra claims that she is wholly overcome by her passion, which has completely abolished her moral consciousness (*periere mores [...] et qui redire cum perit nescit pudor: 112 f.*): for her there is only one possibility: to connect crimes with crimes (*per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter: 115*); by a complete reversal of values, absolute evil became her rule (*te decet maius nefas: 124*). Then she reveals which wrongs she endured from Agamemnon: as mother, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and, as wife, his constant infidelities. Clytemnestra's

²⁰ On the workings of passion according to the Stoics and the links between love and revenge, see, for instance, Armisen-Marchetti 1990b and 1992.

lethal passion is particularly inflamed by the last infidelity, where both sorts of injuries commingle because she thinks that Agamemnon might marry Cassandra. She therefore wants to mix together her own blood and that of her husband (*perde pereundo virum*: 201). On meeting Aegisthes, she seems to repent. If her repentance is genuine, she shows, by her subsequent behavior, that she is nonetheless unable to overcome her passion; if, as is more probable, she is feigning repentance, she employs trickery in the service of her passion, according to the design she had earlier expressed to the nurse (*nunc evolve femineos dolos*: 116). When the murder, fomented by both lovers, is being committed, she strikes her husband with a violence that is very different from the weakness with which Aegisthes strikes him (890–900). At the end of the play, with Electra's intervention and Orestes's arrival, the vengeance appears likely to continue. Cassandra's last word confirms this impression (*veniet et vobis furor*: 1022). Actually, Cassandra, at least on one point, is the Trojan image of Clytemnestra: she is also filled with a passion for vengeance. Without a doubt she sometimes behaves more nobly, wanting, for example, to assume the whole burden of her misfortune herself (*nostris ipsa sufficiam malis*: 683). But, when she wants to beat the blow of the hangmen it is not out of a willful acceptance of death, as is the case for Polyxena and Astyanax, symbols of Stoic heroism, but rather a jubilant satisfaction, because she has prolonged her life until wholly sating her desire for vengeance (*iam, iam iuvat vixisse post Troiam, iuvat*: 1011).

From the outset of the play, Medea is abruptly placed before the spectator filled with the desire of taking vengeance commensurate with her wounded love. Since, after taking her virginity, Jason broke his promise to her, regardless of the crimes she had perpetrated for his sake, she can recover this virginity only if she kills the children born from their copulation (*parta, iam parta ultio est: peperit*: 25b–26a). She goes the whole way, wanting to expel the foetus who could be born (*scrutabor ense viscera*: 1011). Out of love she has murdered her brother and Pelias, out of vengeance she is led to more heinous crimes (*quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus*: 56). By the manner in which she behaves it is shown how passion can hardly be resisted, producing crime after crime (*crescit ingenium malis*: 910a). She is so wholly filled with this passion that she gets her sense of identity from her crimes (*Medea fiam*: 170; *Medea nunc sum*: 910a); she is a being of passion, linking evil to evil.²¹

²¹ On Medea and other characters of Senecan tragedies identifying themselves with evil and building their discourse according to this identification's process, see, for instance, Albrecht 2004b.

She justifies her behavior by the mere fact that the divinities, and at first her ancestor the Sun, allowed the order they had to preserve be transgressed, letting her endure her lot without preventing it (*spectat hoc nostri sator / Sol generis [...] / non redit in ortus [...]?*: 28–31). Consequently, she is right to reverse this order, taking a monstrous crime as her purpose of her action, playing the part the Sun did not assume (*excitiam [...] / caeloque lucem*: 27 f.), leading his chariot in order to accomplish her own designs (32–36).

Two things at least are common to *Thyestes* and *Medea*: a vengeance that, on the one hand, is achieved in the highest degree of atrocity, and that, on the other hand, is justified by the enormity of wrongs endured. Since Thyestes broke divine and human rules by his monstrous actions (the adultery committed with his brother's wife and the stealing of the Golden Fleece, symbol of power), Atreus claims that he is right to take absolute evil as his guide by a total reversal of values. To take vengeance on such a being and bring him to account is to make sacrilege become divine law (*fas est in illo quidquid in fratre est nefas*: 220). For, whatever suffering one might inflict on him, he could inflict it on another. The vengeance Atreus takes on Thyestes (killing the children of his brother), Thyestes could conceive in the same manner, for, as a fellow descendent of Tantalus, he bears the burden of the same hereditary curse (*dignum est Thyeste et dignum Atreo / quod uterque faciat*: 271–272a). The passion for vengeance is for both brothers a heritage by blood. In order to achieve his purpose, Atreus plots some trickery and reveals it to a henchman, who from a prudent adviser quickly becomes an accessory, namely to simulate reconciliation and invite Thyestes to share power with him. In the end Thyestes accepts the offer because his son puts pressure on him, despite presentiments born of past experience. When he arrives with the children, Atreus isolates them, dismembers them in a parody of ritual sacrifice, cooks their flesh, and serves it up to his brother at the banquet supposed to mark the return of peace. He also mixes their blood with the wine, on which Thyestes gets drunk. In order to enjoy his brother's suffering the more (*miserum videre nolo, sed dum miser fit*: 907), Atreus reveals to him what happened with a refinement of cruelty; and only when Thyestes asks for eternal night does Atreus think that his victory is complete (*nunc parta vera est palma. perdideram scelus, / nisi sic doleres*: 1097 f.). But because he taunts his brother with his inclination to act in a similar manner and because Thyestes cries out for vengeance, we have the presentiment that this passion will produce new crimes.

If these tragedies have indeed been written with the purpose of seducing the spectator or reader away from passion, of making them feel the atrocities

its outburst produces, one might wonder whether the produced effect really answers this purpose and whether Stoicism may be present there in another form.

When passion is shown as insistently as in *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon*, as a consequence of a hereditary curse, are the *stulti*, namely most spectators or readers, or even the few *proficientes*, not tempted to conceive of it as an irresistible impulse, independent of their will, and to refuse to assume their responsibility? The Stoic arguments, perceptible in the words of Phaedra's nurse, cannot weigh heavily for them in view of all taints found in themselves and the other men.

Poetry, as has been claimed, by its charm and aesthetic pleasure, far from producing repulsion against monsters such as Medea and Atreus, gives them attractive features. This attractiveness is all the stronger as these characters transmit their dynamism to the whole dramatic action.²² For Littlewood, these characters parody the reason of the Stoics, which gives to every human being his place and his part as an actor on the stage of the world. They also parody the wise man of the Stoics, making an exhibition of himself as a model to be imitated by other men. Their language and behavior originate from the Stoa, but in a counterfeit manner.²³

2.5. *Plays with Parenetic Intention*

Phaedra, Agamemnon, Medea, Atreus, and Thyestes function as counter-examples. Conversely, in two plays of the corpus, *Troades* and *Hercules furens*, there are characters whose moral attitudes are examples to be followed and who support the Seneca's philosophy, namely Stoicism, for, as the Roman says, *longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla* (epist. 6.5). In the last scene of *Trojan Women*, the heroic deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena are related by a messenger, who praises their moral courage (*uterque letum mente generosa tulit*: 1084). The exemplary value of both deaths is emphasized by the fact that the people witnessing them, friends and more particularly enemies, are strongly impressed (*moverat vulgum ac duces / ipsumque Ulixen*: 1098b–1099a; *tam fortis animus omnium mentes ferit*: 1153). This impression stems from the very Stoic manner in which both characters confront death, courageously, with a voluntary impulse of self-assertion going far beyond mere acceptance (*intrepidus animo*: 1093a; *sponte desiluit sua*: 1102b; *fortis et leto obuius*: 1146b; *audax virago [...]* / *conversa ad ictum stat* (1151 f.). That

²² Schiesaro 2003.

²³ Littlewood 2004.

is certainly philosophy in action,²⁴ a manner of dying according to Stoic precepts. However, on hearing the account, we understand how the efficacy of the example is limited. For the impression felt by the crowd toward Astyanax's death, which is considered a sacrilege, does not produce their moral conversion, because they immediately see the death of Polyxena as producing the same ambiguous reaction: *fleuit Achivum turba quod fecit nefas, / idem ille populus aliud ad facinus redit* (1119 f.). Moreover, if Polyxena's behavior really provides an exemplary image of Stoic magnanimity, in her deep motives, she is not free from the passion, shared with all her people, for vengeance on the Greeks, even beyond the grave: *cecidit ut Achilles gravem / factura terram, prona et irato impetus* (1158b–1159). In that sense, she is similar to the Cassandra of *Agamemnon*.

In the case of *Hercules furens*, the whole interpretation of the play is in question, because, whatever may have been said,²⁵ the hero whose name gives the play its title is, by all appearances, the embodiment of Stoic *magnitudo animi*, double-faceted: to accomplish beautiful actions while constant taking care to avoid the trap of pride, clearly perceiving the limits of the human condition. Seneca borrowed the subject matter of the play from Euripides, in order to still more highly praise the exemplary value of the hero, according to the Stoic view. For him also, the fit of madness is not a natural consequence of an egocentric megalomania, but an accident, voluntarily provoked by the goddess Juno, who symbolizes the death-dealing hate of the wife wounded in her love, as claimed in the prologue, according to mythological accounts, and the *mala Fortuna*, dispenser of trials, according to the Stoic view. Giving up the idea of doing away with himself, after the dreadful trial of murderous madness, Hercules accepts life as a new Labor: *succumbe, virtus [...]. / eat ad labores hic quoque Herculeos labor: / vivamus* (1315–1317a). By doing so, he gives his magnanimity a new purpose: no more to perform multiple glorious actions for the sake of men, but to confront humiliations with bravery and regain his innocence, constantly trying to control himself.

2.6. Oedipus

If we refer to criteria already elaborated, *Oedipus* might not fall under either category, for neither the protagonist nor any of the other characters may be considered an example or counter-example, for they are not moved by a

²⁴ Shelton 2000.

²⁵ Fitch (1987a) has perfectly expressed the conception according to which the fit of madness is a natural consequence of Hercules's egocentrism and his ambition beyond measure. For a critical study of this conception, see Chaumartin 1996a and 1998.

destroying passion, nor do they embody behavior to be emulated. Oedipus and Jocasta, having a destiny determined by a hereditary curse, are doomed to commit incest, a crime that reverses the natural order. Are they responsible for these actions and, filled with an unbearable burden of culpability—which they can only flee by mutilating their bodies and doing away with themselves—do they consequently free themselves from all culpability? The moral attitudes of Oedipus and Jocasta oscillate between these opposite poles: *fecimus caelum nocens* (36); *fati ista culpa est: nemo fit fato nocens* (1019); *socia cur scelerum dare / poenas recusas?* (1024 f.). As for the chorus, voice of the Theban people, which is confined in a space of darkness and calamity delineated by the structure of the play, its members call for acquiescence to a fate indifferent to the pains of men, without catching a glimpse of a safe path: *fatis agimur: cedite fatis / non sollicitae possunt curae / mutare rati stamina fusi* (980–983).

Thus, the play evidently has a philosophical signification. It portrays the disorder of man in a world where he is moved by unknown powers, of which he understands neither the nature nor the way, doomed to err in a constant woolliness, marked from his birth by a culpability that leads him to crimes where the engagement and the limits of his own responsibility are in question. Nowhere is the Stoic conviction uttered that disorder is part of a higher order whose signification, unknown to most men, is accessible to the wise man. Seneca carries to extremes the temptation, sometimes perceptible in the philosophical works, in order to cast doubts on the power of human reason to understand the destiny of men and find for them a rule of conduct.²⁶

2.7. *Philosophical Elements in the Chorus's Songs*

In all plays, according to a tradition tracing back to Greek theater, the chorus are the spokesmen of their communities, placed under the protagonists' rule, with whom their fate is connected. Their comments on the action in songs sometimes belong to a common wisdom and sometimes bear the stamp of a particular philosophical school. It is a delicate question whether or not these views are illuminating for understanding a play.

In *Medea*, for example, two odes have a central place immediately after each of the two moments where the plot is brought to a head, namely the dialogues between Medea and Creon and between Medea and Jason. In the

²⁶ Chaumartin 1999 and 2002, Curley 1986.

first (301–379), the Argonauts are blamed for reversing the order of nature when they discovered navigation on the high seas (*ausus Tiphys pandere vasto / carbasa ponto*: 318f.) and took Medea with them as a reward for her services (*maius mari Medea malum*: 362). In the second (579–669), the endured punishments and the greatness of their mistake (breaking *sancta / foedera mundi*: 605f.) are recalled; moreover, the gods are asked to pity Jason, because he was obeying Pelias's command. In both of these odes, Medea's fate is indissolubly linked with that of the Argonauts. Their resentment of the sorceress answers her own resentment for them, for she claims that she committed all her crimes for their sake (*totiens nocens sum facta, sed numquam mihi*: 280). Her tragedy is also their tragedy: she and they are punished for violating the laws of the universe. Thus, the individual drama acquires a cosmic signification: Medea represents evil begetting evil.

One point is worth noting. In the first ode, primitive life is recalled, before the high seas were navigated, when they were used only for a kind of coasting. Then, human communities lived in well-divided territories, in a pacific state of self-sufficiency. According to M. Nussbaum,²⁷ this primitive life does not answer, as the greatest number of scholars think (particularly C.D.N. Costa), the traditional conception of the Golden Age, but, according to the Stoic view, is considered an image of the Stoics' virtue, an autarchy based on the disdain of external goods. Moreover, she says that Seneca discreetly seems to underrate a conception that is too reductive, in his opinion, and suggests instead a nostalgia for the conquering and discovering spirit (374–379). It might be answered that for Seneca the virtues that are spontaneously practiced by the primitive communities are not true virtues, because these involve a voluntary effort (*epist.* 90.44–46): *non enim dat natura virtutem: ars est bonum fieri. [...] virtus non contingit animo nisi instituto et edocto et ad summum adsidua exercitatione perducto*. For him, as for the Stoics, navigation of the high seas, as well as all other technology, is not an evil in itself, but only because men use it wrongly, in order to satiate their greed.²⁸ Because of this wrongful use, we might slightly bemoan the loss of the primitive life, without considering it an ideal. Actually, the Stoics have a heroic virtue, the *magnitudo animi*. Its main characteristic is to act in a such a way as to avoid the dangers of pride and greed.

²⁷ Nussbaum 1993b.

²⁸ In some passages of *De beneficiis* 2 and 4, Seneca expresses a high opinion of technology, among the greatest benefits given to men by the gods. See Chaumartin 1985.

In the first ode of *Hercules furens*, a way of life, remote from greatness, in the calm of a rustic retirement as found in pastoral poetry, is praised. This ideal of life is epicurean. At the end of this ode, the ideal of heroic life, embodied by Hercules, namely the unbridled quest for glory through great deeds, is censured upon the grounds that it leads to calamity (*alte virtus animosa cadit*: 201). According to Davis (1993), the end of the play is forestalled here, Hercules's fall into madness, the slaughter of his people, his desire for self-destruction. Seneca himself shares this ideal of life with the chorus, whom he makes his spokesman; thus the signification of the play is apotropaic: its purpose is to seduce the audience away from the ideal of life embodied by Hercules. But, if one considers Hercules's conversion to humility, in his dialogue with his father Amphytrion and in his discovery of a possible redemption through his own efforts, one judges things very differently. For him, the first ode seems to be warning Hercules against the risk of pride involved in the *magnitudo animi*, even if it is practiced for the sake of weak men and against tyrants. But this does not mean that Seneca praises a passive and risk-free way of life. On coming to a safe path, Hercules opens a new space to his magnanimity. The meaning of the play is wholly Stoic: it is a sort of parenesis elaborated by the Stoic philosopher, Seneca.

3. CONCLUSION

Reaching the end of this chapter, how may the question asked in its title be answered? Is Senecan theater philosophical theater?

As a Stoic philosopher, sharing his school's admiration for Euripides's tragedies, might the Roman understand his theater otherwise than as an aide to ethics? The views expressed in the philosophical works on the function of theater leave no doubt about this orientation. The purpose was achieved not by giving a systematic account of Stoic thought, as in a didactic poem, but by using mythological figures, borrowed from Greek theater, for apotropaic and parenetic designs. Actually, only *Hercules furens* seems to answer, in its structure, this parenetic intention, an intention that was already present, but in a different way, in Euripides's play, which served as its model.

For plays with apotropaic purpose, if the initial intention seems to be certain the efficiency of the achieved design is problematic and vigorously contested. Might not the spectator or the reader feel more inclination than repulsion for characters such as Atreus or Medea, who, in spite of heinous crimes, assert themselves by their power, carry out a wholly independent action until a victorious end, and are adorned with the seductive brightness of poetry?

Are not the spectacle or the reading able to produce strong emotions with an aesthetic pleasure rather than an aversion for monstrous behavior that sometimes travesties the Stoic ideals?

If the tragedies are considered in themselves, disregarding intentions with which Seneca rightfully may be credited, as I have tried to explain, what could be the answer to our question? It appears immediately. As do all great works, such as *Aeneid*, Mozart's music, Van Gogh's paintings, the Senecan tragedies belong to philosophy, because they are a particular figuration of the human condition. They show men wholly unarmed against a fate striking them even before their birth, without their understanding. They show these men at grips with an evil, present in themselves and in the world, from which they cannot be free to find a rule of conduct. They show the disorder of a world deserted by God or bearing witness that this God does not exist. From this point of view, also, only *Hercules furens* opens a path to possible safety.

PART FOUR

APOCOLOCYNTOSIS

APOCOLOCYNTOSIS

Renata Roncali

This is the title of a satirical booklet, written in Latin, full of proverbs, quotations, and Greek formulae, telling of the apotheosis manqué of the Roman Emperor Claudius after his death. The text is written in prose, interposed with sections of poetry of varying length. It opens with a preface (chapter 1), in which the subject of the narrative is announced rather ambiguously: “to place on record the proceedings in heaven October 13th.” The year is not immediately known; it is a “new year, which begins this auspicious age.” The author writes in the first person: “I wish to place on record,”¹ parodying a language employed by historians, and invoking witnesses to confirm his veracity. The first part of the story opens with two pieces in hexameters, alternating with prose, which describe the month and time of the Emperor Claudius’s death (chapter 2). There then follows a celestial scene in which Mercury and Clotho are debating the moment at which Claudius should die (chapter 3). Once the thread of life is cut by Clotho’s hand, thirty-two carefully constructed hexameters celebrate the *laudes Neronis*, comparing the successor to Claudius’s imperial throne to the brightest star in the firmament and the Sun itself (Apollo). Lachesis is the Fate who spins the thread of the new golden age. The scene returns briefly to earth to spell out the final dramatic moments of Claudius’s death in the middle of a banquet, with entertainment provided by a troupe of *comoedi*. A second preface (chapter 5) introduces Claudius’s ascent to heaven, where he would expect to be received with divine honors: “What happened afterward on earth is superfluous to describe. For you know very well, and there is no danger that things which the universal joy had impressed upon the memory will slip from it; no one forgets his own good fortune. Listen to what happened in heaven: it is on the authority of the narrator.”²

¹ *Quid actum sit in caelo ante diem III idus Octobris anno novo, initio saeculi felicissimi, volo memoriae tradere.*

² *Quae in terris postea sint acta supervacuum est referre. Scitis enim optime, nec periculum est ne excidant quae memoriae gaudium publicum impresserit: nemo felicitatis suae obliviscitur. In caelo quae acta sint audite: fides penes auctorem erit.* Quotations from the *Apocolocyntosis*, translated from Latin to English by Allan Perley Ball (Ball 1902).

The celestial scene unfolds in chapters 5.2–11: Claudius is received by Hercules—who has been asked by Jupiter to find out what kind of man this aspiring god is and who soon comes to believe that this is his “thirteenth labor”—and by the goddess Fever, who had lived at length with Claudius on earth. Both Hercules and Fever allude to the identity of the newcomer, without explicitly mentioning the name of the strange fellow who has turned up at heaven’s gate. There is an obvious and probably fairly lengthy lacuna between chapters 7 and 8, which is found in all the manuscripts, in which Claudius’s entrance to the assembly of the gods was described. Because of this lacuna, the reader is thrown *ex abrupto* into the midst of a heated discussion among several protagonists, who remain unidentified. The various interventions concern the question of whether or not the new emperor should be portrayed as an Epicurean divinity or as a Stoic.³ Jupiter restores order to the proceedings, and invites two “local” divinities to have their say: one, Janus, the god of the Forum, who “sees at once both forward and backward,” in the anti-Claudian camp (“Once,” said he, “it was a great thing to be made a god, but now you have made the distinction *a farce*”); the other, a Gallic divinity, Diespiter, in favor, who believes that Claudius’s imminent deification should rank alongside Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Augustus’s intervention, the longest of all, characterized by both solemn and vulgar language, attacks Claudius and condemns him to expulsion from heaven within thirty days and from Olympus within three (chapters 10 f.).

Poor Claudius goes back to earth, where he witnesses his own funeral, a grandiose affair with no expense spared, accompanied by deafening music from trumpet and horn players (chapter 12). A large choir sings an anapaestic funeral dirge, the rhythm of war: funeral dirges are supposed to pay homage to the dead, but this particular dirge, from the meter onward, parodies Claudius’s *laudes*. The final scene is set in Hades (chapters 13–15). Claudius makes his way down to Dis’s house and encounters Cerberus and the serried ranks of his former victims, led by Messalina. The court of Aeacus condemns him to suffer according to his sins (in line with the law of retaliation, formulated with the words of a now proverbial Hesiodic verse); but given that it does not seem fair to write off the celebrated damned (Sisyphus, Tantalus, Ixion, the Danaides, and possibly also Tityus) and apply their punishments to Claudius,

³ In an eighteenth-century French codex, the Paris. Lat. 10413, the learned copyist has split the *oratio* in chapter 8 between Hercules and the interlocutor gods called *deus aliquis*, *deus alius*. At the same time, based on a French translation, Neubur split the interventions between Hercules, Claudius, and a Semonum *princeps* (see Roncali 1990: 29).

they decide to devise a new punishment for him. Suddenly, right at the end, Caligula appears and demands Claudius as his slave. Claudius is assigned to him, but Caligula then gives him to Aeacus, the infernal judge, who in turn passes him on to his freedman, Menander, as his servant and law clerk (*a cognitionibus*).⁴

According to the monk Xiphilinus's epitome of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, written during the twelfth century, which allows us to reconstruct the lost sections of Dio's text, many prodigies occurred at Claudius's death: a comet appeared, as did a shower of blood; a bolt of lightening struck the praetorians' standards; the temple of Jupiter Victor opened up of its own accord; and a swarm of bees attacked the army, killing an official in each charge. Claudius got the funeral and the other honors that Augustus had received.

Agrippina and Nero feigned sorrow for the man whom they had killed, and elevated to heaven him whom they had carried out violently from the banquet. At this point, Lucius Iunius Gallio, Seneca's brother, authored a most witty saying. Seneca himself had composed a work that he called 'Gourdification' [*apokolokyntosis*]—a word coined on the analogy of 'deification' [*apotheosis*]. (60.35)

Based on this evidence, the humanist Hadrianus Junius believed that he had identified the text described by Dio (Xiphilinus) as the booklet attributed to Seneca in mediaeval manuscripts, which went under two different titles: in the most ancient manuscripts, *Divi Claudii ΑΠΟΘΗΟΣΙΣ* (sic) *Annei Senece per satiram*, and *Senece Ludus de morte Claudii*. These, respectively, are the Codex Sangallensis 569 (S, 9th-century ex.) and the Codex Valentianensis 411 (V, 9th-century ex.). The immediate subject of the first title is the celestial apotheosis reserved for Claudius. The apotheosis, from Augustus onward, should have been the right of emperors (but neither Tiberius nor Caligula deserved it). The second title refers to the earthly event that was the emperor's death.

It should be emphasized that in these two ancient codices the text of the satire/*ludus* is not found alongside any of Seneca's works:⁵ it appears together with texts that are far removed from its genre in terms of content, but not

⁴ The office, *a cognitionibus*, apart from our text, occurs first in an epigraph from the Claudian era that refers to an *adiutor a cognitionibus* (CIL VI 8634); during the first two centuries the incumbency was entrusted to both *servi* and *liberti*.

⁵ However, in Codex L (Londiniensis Add. 11983), which dates from the 11/12th century, the *Ludus* is preceded by the *De clementia*.

form, such as the Visions, the *revelationes*, the Apocalyptic works, and the Lives of the Saints. The Codex Sangallensis 569 is composed of eight parts,⁶ all similar in content (lives and *passiones* of the saints): the seventh part contains an Apocalyptic text, attributed to Bishop Methodius of Olympia, preceded by Seneca's satire and written in the same hand. The Codex Valentianensis 411 contains grammatical works, proverbs, assorted *Carmina* (later brought together in the *Anthologia latina*), followed by Seneca's *ludus* and Walahfrid Strabo's *Visio Wettini*. It would therefore appear likely that the satire had been obliged to circulate anonymously and that at some point it resurfaced, when it was copied along with texts of apparently similar genre.⁷

The two ancient manuscripts are the main representatives of a bipartite tradition distinguished by significant variations in the text that arose during transmission (one of these concerns the finale of the text), although it descends from a unique archetype marred by a serious lacuna (between chapters 7 and 8), which occurs in both branches of the tradition. Apart from the late-eleventh/early-twelfth-century London codex (L) on the V line, there are a further six twelfth/thirteenth-century manuscripts, twenty-two fourteenth-century and eighteen fifteenth-century manuscripts, and an eighteenth-century Parisian manuscript, previously mentioned à propos the splitting up of the dialogue in chapter 8. Altogether, fifty manuscripts have survived:⁸ France holds the largest number (in Paris; possibly the oldest Mediaeval codex of all is of French origin, preserved in the Valenciennes Municipal Library), followed by Italy (mostly in the Vatican), and England.

The *editio princeps* was published in Rome, probably in 1513, under the title *Lucii Annaei Senecae in morte Claudii Caesaris ludus nuper repertus*, and dedicated to Albertus Pius Prince of Carpi by Sylvanus Germanicus.⁹ The text, which is full of interpolations, agrees with that of the Codex Vaticanus Latinus 4498 (15th century). A further edition, published in Basle in 1515 by the humanist scholar Beatus Rhenanus and embellished with scholia, largely formed the basis for the later editions. During the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, many editions *cum notis variorum*, edited by famous

⁶ See Scarpatetti 2003: 70–74 (part VIII is only a page-fragment).

⁷ There are many formal and substantial motifs common both to the texts that hand down the *visiones*, the lives of saints, etc., and to the text of the anti-Claudian satire: see Roncali 1998: 289–295.

⁸ Cf. Roncali 2011.

⁹ A rare work. There are only two copies in Italy, conserved in the Vatican Apostolic Library and the National Library in Naples. The date can be deduced from that of the dedication (August 2, 1513), since it is a *sine notis* edition (cf. Periti 2004).

humanists appeared: Andreas Alciatus, Hadrianus Junius, Antonius Muretus, Nicolaus Faber, Daniel Heinsius, Justus Lipsius, Libertus Fromondus, and J. Fred. Gronovius. Gottlieb Cortius published the *Apocolocyntosis* in Leipzig in 1720, together with Justus Lipsius's *Somnium* and Petrus Cunaeus's *Sardi venales*. The first complete Teubnerian edition of Seneca, edited by Fr. Haase (1852–1862), also contained the *Ludus*: this text was, however, not critically founded and still contained all the interpolations (albeit marked by square expunction brackets). Franz Bücheler's 1864 edition marked a turning point in the editing of the *Apocolocyntosis*: the text from the Codex Sangallensis, since then regarded as the *codex optimus*, formed the basis for the first time.

We have already said that this exceptional booklet goes under at least three titles: *Divi Claudii* 'Αποθέωσις *per satiram* (Codex S), *Ludus de morte Claudii* (Codex V), and 'Αποκολοκύντωσις (Dio Cassius/Xiphilinus). Since the nineteenth century, the Vulgate entitles it 'Αποκολοκύντωσις, and it is almost universally known under this title.¹⁰ It is not entirely clear what the meaning of *apocolocyntosis* is. Hadrianus Junius maintained that it was connected with the pumpkin, mainly used in the medical field as a purge. This was said to have been mixed with the poisoned mush administered to Claudius under the pretext of ridding his intestines from fungus poisoning (as mentioned by Suet. *Claud.* 44). Fabricius maintained that Claudius had reached his apotheosis “*per esum boleti sive κολοκύντου*.” Modern scholars have suggested a different interpretation along the same lines, based on Dio Cassius's text: not *apokolokyntosis*, but *apokolokenosis*, meaning evacuation of the bowels.¹¹ Fromondus's notes were the forerunners of this interpretation of the term *kolokynte* = *stultus*, which then became the prevailing one. We are therefore dealing with the deification of a pumpkin: “a man who turns into a god or a pumpkin, this is not such an extraordinary or impertinent metamorphosis, but when it is a pumpkin who turns into a god, then that really is a paradoxical thing.” Bücheler (ed. 1864: 37) was working on a pumpkin/fool analogy; the

¹⁰ Dio Cassius's codices, it should be said, do not agree: there is also the lection ἀποκολοκύντωσις, which could refer to the beating of Gallio, Seneca's brother, named in the passage by Dio along with Seneca, rather than to the more famous philosopher. Hadrianus Junius knew only the ἀποκολοκύντωσις lection. See Roncali 1989: 15 f. As regards the titles of the modern editions, I should like to record the “differences” here: *Ludus de morte Claudii* (Fickert, Leipzig 1845; Haase, Leipzig 1852); *Divi Claudii Apotheosis per saturam* (Roszbach, Berlin 1926); *Apotheosis Divi Claudii* (Herrmann, Leiden 1950). Nor should the singular consolidation of direct and indirect tradition in the title: *Divi Claudii* 'Αποκολοκύντωσις (Russo, Florence 1948 [6th ed. 1985]; Eden, Cambridge 1984; Lund, Heidelberg 1994) be overlooked.

¹¹ Currie 1962, taken up by Pulbrook 1981.

reference is to a well-known passage from Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*: "we are not such a pumpkin head as to die on your behalf."¹²

The metaphoric value can be summed up by Russo's formula "zucconeria divinizzata." Indeed, in the Greek world, the *kolokynte* is particularly associated with the notion of "health," and could also mean "immortal god." Others were of the opinion that the satire described an actual transformation into a pumpkin somewhere in the lost text, in the finale, or in the lacuna between chapters 7 and 8. The theory of the two satires written by Seneca on the death of Claudius, only one of which has survived, should also be borne in mind (Wachsmuth 1888, Birt 1888). Some authors have remembered that the pumpkin is used to represent the dice box (the *fritillus*), and being constrained to play dice using a bottomless box was the *poena* to which Claudius initially appeared to be condemned down in Hades.

Some scholars have read *apokolokyntosis* as being an allusion to *aporphanidosis*. The enigma of the title, according to a more recent theory, could be resolved bearing two points in mind: the literary genre, Menippean satire, and the metaphor of the pumpkin (although it is worth bearing in mind the fact that Claudius was not actually turned into a pumpkin). The reference for the first point is to Bakhtin, for whom the satirical genre equates to a "carnivalization of literature," which is actually accomplished in the Roman feasts of Saturnalia. The main connotations of the pumpkin are those of life—death and absurdity—stupidity. The *Apocolocyntosis* was written for the Saturnalia carnivals (Claudius is elected *Saturnalicus princeps*), when the king becomes a clown and a clown the king: the *Apocolocyntosis* is supposed to be a parody of the deification of a king of fools (or of a foolish king) written in the spirit of a carnival jape.¹³ Research is ongoing on, however, and among the most recent interpretations is that it could in fact have been an irreverent nickname, *Zucca*, given to the Emperor Claudius, which must have been known within imperial palace circles. There are many known examples of derisory nicknames that have been applied to famous people, but unfortunately, in this case, there is only one instance of this nickname—in this particular text—and this is not even handed down by direct tradition.¹⁴

The story unfolds in the manner of a recitation: at court, we know that it was usual to recite *nec tantum carmina et historias, sed et orationes et*

¹² *Nos cucurbitae caput non habemus, ut pro te moriamur* (1.15.2).

¹³ See Haarberg 1982.

¹⁴ Hoyos 1991, taken from Baldwin 1993a. Heller 1985 deals with the history of the various meanings of the title; see also Roncali 1989.

dialogs.¹⁵ The measured pauses, the alternation of prose and verse, and the quoting of famous formulas, sentences, and verses were intended to make the narration of facts lively and varied. A clear signal for the oration to commence can be found in the second preface: *in caelo quae acta sint audite*. The *auctor* addresses his audience directly. The dialogue between the characters predominates: Mercury and Clotho (chapter 3); Hercules and Fever (chapters 5–7); unidentified divinities (chapter 8); Jupiter, Janus, Diespiter, and Augustus (chapters 9–11: assembly of the gods); and Claudius and infernal characters (chapter 13). Chapter 1 is the proem; chapter 4 contains *laudes Neronis*, in hexameters; chapter 12 contains a *mega chorikon* in anapaestic dimeters, the *laudes Claudii*. The first part (chapter 2) and the final part (chapter 14), which are taken up with elaborate hexameters that integrate and repeat the surrounding prose, are by the narrator. The action is fast: two *caesurae* distinguish three great scenes: earth (with extraterrestrial digressions)—heaven (including a passage set on earth for Claudius's funeral)—and Hades. The phrases used to link the scenes are pithy: *Omnia certe concacavit. Quae in terris postea sint acta supervacuum est referre [...]* *in caelo quae acta sint audite* (4.3–5.1): so the earthly scene ends. *Nec mora Cyllenius illum collo obtorto trahit ad inferos a caelo unde negant redire quemquam* (11.6): this is how the celestial scene draws to a close.

Otto Weinreich (1923) split the text into lengthy scenes: (1) Dreiteilige Ouvertüre (three-part overture); (2) Erstes Hauptstück: Claudii Himmelfahrt (scene 1: Claudius's ascension into heaven); (3) Intermezzo; (4) Zweites Hauptstück: Claudii Höllenfahrt (scene 2: Claudius's descent into hell); (5) Exodium (finale). Many critics have suggested a division of the piece into acts: they have compared the sections of the action in the *Apocolocyntosis* with those of the better-known New Comedy, and have suggested dividing the text into five acts: Act I—comprising the preface and the death of Claudius, Act II—Claudius at the gates of Olympus, Act III—the tumultuous debate of the gods opposed to the deification of Claudius, Act IV—the vicissitudes, the intervention of the gods, and Augustus's speech, and Act V—the epilogue: Claudius, thrown out of heaven, attends his own funeral and is taken down to Hades where judgment is pronounced.¹⁶ These great divisions are sometimes marked by verses alternating with prose: tragic imitation can therefore overlap epos imitation. In any event, the humanists used to break the narrative up with commentary, and it was still possible to find the

¹⁵ Suet. *Aug.* 89.5.

¹⁶ Korzeniewski 1982, Blänsdorf 1986.

text presented in this way prior to the printed editions in three fifteenth-century Oxford manuscripts in which the text is interposed with lengthy interpretative *glose*.¹⁷

The protagonist of the booklet is the Emperor Claudius. His tutor for the duration of the journey is Mercury, a fan of the emperor's *ingenium*.¹⁸ In the celestial sphere, there are numerous interlocutors: Clotho, Phoebus/Apollo, Hercules, Fever, anonymous divinities, Jupiter, Janus, Diespiter, Augustus, and a jurisconsult. In the infernal part: Narcissus the freedman, Pedo Pompeius, Claudius' patron, and Aeacus. Mute, but taking part in the scene, are Lachesis, Claudius's victims, and Caligula.

The text, as Knoche (1949) observes, constitutes a *unicum* in Latin literary history. It is a unique complete example of Menippean satire both in terms of content (some of the typical themes are the *concilium deorum*, the parody of the historians, and the descent into Hades) and in terms of narrative structure and style (*prosimetron*, a mix of solemn and vulgar vocabulary, quotations adapted to fit the context, and a taste for the *inversum*). Bakhtinian suggestions have recently caught the attention of scholars, who have driven the interpretation of this ancient text toward a modern transposition of the genre of "carnival literature." Therefore, in this short anti-Claudian satire, all fourteen points that were distinctive of Menippean character according to the Bakhtinian schema are to be found: comic effect, freedom of imagination, provocative elements, sordid naturalism, extreme situations, three-layered constructs, unusual points of view, experimentation with abnormal mental and moral states, scandals and eccentricity, *mésalliances* and contrasts, utopian elements, insertions of the most varied genres, the pluristylistic *mélange*, and its journalistic current affairs character.¹⁹ Some examples can be given here: from the first words of the preface, we realize that we are encountering an adventurous and fantastic story; the gods' tirades contain the requisite references to scandalous scenes; different literary genres are introduced (from the hexameters of epic poetry to the iambs of tragedy); in some respects, the nature of the tale is journalistic: in fact the term pamphlet is often used to define this work by Seneca. But the real strong point comes tenth on the list: contraposition, contrast: the emperor who becomes slave

¹⁷ These were the Codices Balliolensis 130, Balliolensis 136, and Bodleianus 292 (apograph of the Ball. 130). The *glose* could be the work of Nicholas Trevet: see Clairmont 1980. Please note that the text of Seneca's satire was divided into chapters (as now) only from Bücheler's edition (1864).

¹⁸ Trimalchio also enjoyed the protection of Mercury (Petron. 29.5; 77.4).

¹⁹ See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ch. IV), quoted by Mazzoli 1982.

to a freedman. Even the continual reference to contemporary philosophy has its place in the Bakhtinian construct.²⁰

Rhetoric and Philosophy are the pamphlet's principal Muses. The taste for rhetorical exercise manifests itself in various ways: in the use of the two languages, Greek and Latin,²¹ and of the quotations—we often find Homer with Virgil among the poets. Some of these quotations are part of the heritage of the art of rhetoric: the Homeric verse “Who and whence art thou, and where are thy city and parents?”²² quoted in 5.4 is one of the rhetorical *schemata* and is widely quoted in literature of the most wide-ranging kinds. The Euripidean verse in *Kresphontes* (4.2) “[when someone dies] they give him a happy funeral with words that wish him well”²³ is part of a set of verses often quoted by rhetors and philosophers in contexts that relate to birth and death: Sextus Empiricus, Clemens Alexandrinus, Menander Rhetor, Libanius, Aristides, Epictetus, Stobaeus, Scholia to Hermogenes, and so on: Cicero also translates them in his *Tusculanae Disputationes* (1.48.115), providing the title of Euripides's tragedy, the only one of the authors who have quoted these verses to do so. The Virgilian verse (in 3.2) taken from *Georgics*, “condemn him to die, let a better man reign in the empty palace,”²⁴ is listed by the grammarians among the *exempla elocutionum*. The insistence on the motif of the *memoria*²⁵ belongs to the rhetorical *praefationes*;²⁶ the rapid dialogue, the means of expression and the proverbs²⁷ clearly refer to the style of the rhetors, also to be found in another text similar to the anti-Claudian satire, Petronius's *Satyricon*. Rhetoric and philosophy work well to provide a theme that runs all the way through the booklet, but which only breaks through in the final part: the kingdom of the dead. For this variegated finale, the author has recourse to three famous poets and to three equally famous passages: Catullus—who is not cited anywhere else in Seneca—taken from the Epicedium of the *passer* (*carmen* 3, in 11.6); Horace—the only *carmen* ever to have been cited in any of Seneca's works—*Ode* 2.13 on the subject of the *Regna Proserpinae* (in 13.3), and, in particular, the name of the *auctor* of the exceptional definition of

²⁰ Cf. also Riikonen 1987.

²¹ Cf. Sen. *suas.* 4.5: *dicebat suasorias libentissime et frequentius Graecas quam Latinas* (“he recited *suasoriae* with great pleasure and usually in Greek rather than in Latin”).

²² Τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν, πόθι τοι πόλις ἦδὲ τοκῆς; (*Od.* 1.170 etc.).

²³ Χαίροντας εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων (*TrGF* 5 Euripides, ed. Kannicht, F 449).

²⁴ *Dede neci, melior vacua sine regnet in aula* (*georg.* 4.90).

²⁵ *Volo memoriae tradere* (1.1); *ne excidant quae memoriae gaudium publicum impresserit* (5.1); *si memoria repetis* (7.4).

²⁶ For example, see *contr.* 1 *pr.* 1–5 and 20 by Seneca the Elder.

²⁷ See the detailed analysis in Roncali 1987: 99–103.

Cerberus of the one hundred heads (*belua centiceps*); and the description of the journey to Hades is taken from the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid* (*facile descenditur [...] pervenit ad ianuam Ditis*: 126 f., in 13.3).

There is no well-defined style in this booklet. As we have seen, Petronius is the author who comes closest, but there are also shades of Plautus and Cicero of the Letters, the epic poets of the Imperial Age, Ovid. What is more, the entire repertoire of the Greek and Latin paremiographers is there for us to discover, the religious formulae and the philosophical definitions, the technical language of the courts, the orators and the historians; the metaphor of rustic life and the metaphor of war; the overturning of meanings, not to mention an abundance of parallel structures, pleonasms, neologisms. Every period has its own surprise to spring, a model to hide, a motif to recall. A similar pamphlet, Emperor Julianus's *Caesars*, was described by Gibbon as "one of the most agreeable and instructive productions of ancient wit [...] the *Caesars* of Julian are of such an original cast, that the critic is perplexed to which class he should ascribe them."²⁸

The *pièce* was probably performed in front of a select audience. The occasion would have been a day (or night?) close to the time of the emperor's death, since post-mortem invective is easier to comprehend the more immediate it is. The date might have been that of the Saturnalia in mid-December: this is a very seductive theory, given that this festival is referred to, albeit indirectly, but very cleverly, in at least two places: Claudius is elected *Saturnalicus princeps* during the assembly of the gods, after Saturn is remembered as the bestower of *beneficia* (8.2), and on Claudius's death, the *iurisconsulti* witness the misfortunes of the *causidici* saying: *non semper Saturnalia erunt* (12.2). But the game of dice, which was Claudius's favorite game and which he was condemned to play forever by the infernal judge, also serves to remind us of the festival of Saturnalia, as does the taste for the *inversum*, which is in perfect correspondence with the spirit of the Saturnalia: consider the alternation *rex—fatuus* when describing the figure of Claudius, but also the reversal of the slave—master role that will take place during the finale of the satire when Claudius becomes the slave of a freedman. It is also worth bearing in mind that the Saturnalia play a prominent part in many literary texts, such as those by Martial, Lucian, and Julianus.²⁹

²⁸ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. 24 (first lines).

²⁹ Nauta 1987 makes an important point in this regard, noting that the audience for whom this work was intended must have been a select one: we are, therefore, dealing with an anti-

Another possible date for the satire's composition could have been the celebrations in honor of Isis between October 28 and November 3; the rite ended with the discovery of the body of the assassinated Osiris and with the solemn lament: εὐρήκαμεν συγχαίρωμεν. It is with these exact words that Claudius is greeted by his victims, who are singing and clapping their hands on his arrival in Hades. In fact, Caligula, the "Isiac" emperor, suddenly appears in the final scene of the story of Claudius. Caligula has, in any case, already been recalled by Augustus into the presence of the gathered assembly, and accused of competing with Claudius in terms of ferocity (10.2): Drusilla, his sister and wife, is called to mind in the literarily important preface to the *Apocolocyntosis*. Drusilla's sister, Agrippina, is never mentioned, but was probably the inspiration for the satire against Claudius at court as well as for his death, as is well known.³⁰

This piece by Seneca seems not to have become immediately well known. There is no mention of it in two other ancient sources that bring Claudius's reign to life for us. Tacitus, the historian, writes in his *Annals* (13.3.1) that on Claudius's death, Seneca was charged by Nero with composing a *laudatio funebris*: this formed part of the ceremony of the *consecratio* and was declaimed by the emperor. The *laudatio* mentioned his noble birth, the triumphs of his ancestors, peace, and the emperor's sagacity. A piece worthy of Seneca, "a man of pleasing wit and suited to the tastes of the time."³¹ That commendatory oration has not been preserved. Tacitus refers to many of the details, and also makes some interesting comments: "when Nero began to speak of Claudius's prudence and wisdom, noone forbore to laugh."³² Why then does Tacitus not also mention the satirical booklet?

Suetonius, who devoted the final chapters of his *Life of Claudius* to a detailed description of the emperor's death, also fails to mention either the *laudatio* or the satire. Yet, he does not forget to flag an anonymous treatise written against Claudius (*stultus*/μωρός) that was making the rounds during his lifetime, allusively entitled, in Greek, "The Resurrection of Fools" (Claud. 38).

Claudian pièce geared not to the general public, but rather to Nero and his *sodales*, the court, in other words.

³⁰ Köberlein 1962. Agrippina is the only member of the "Isis" group left alive. For Claudius and Agrippina, heirs to the Ptolomeans, see the Claudian Vienna cameo, with the double cornucopia of plenty: J. Charbonneaux, "Sarapis et Isis et la double corne d'abondance," in *Homages à Waldemar Déonna*, Brussels 1957, 139 f. (Plate XXVI. 2).

³¹ *Ingenium amoenum et temporis eius auribus accommodatum.*

³² *Postquam ad providentiam sapientiamque flexit, nemo risui temperare.*

The anti-Claudian booklet is never explicitly cited by the ancients. The short passage from Juvenal (6.620–623) that describes Agrippina's nefarious plot³³ does not effectively correspond to any part of Seneca's satire, in which, as we know, Agrippina is never mentioned and neither is the poisoned mushroom that caused Claudius's death. On the other hand, themes and quotations that occur in the controversial second book of Tertullian's opus *Ad nationes* find interesting correspondences in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*: see Varro's description of the Stoic god, Epicurus and his philosophy, and the episode about Thales who failed to look down and believed he was exploring the sky. Tertullian argues against the superstitions that lead not just to the deification of men but cause animals to be venerated, too. He cites the proverb of the Labors of Hercules that relates to the Augean stables, mentions Hercules and Diespiter, and Jupiter's incest (3.4.9.10.13).³⁴ A narrative construct in which poetic hexameters alternate with prose similar to that used for the description of the time in which Claudius died can be found at the beginning of an epistle by Ausonius (19, ed. Prete): here again the periphrasis of the time involves the sun and the moon, day and night.

We have already touched on a major "Menippean" work: the *Caesars* (Συμπόσιον ἢ Κρόνια) by Emperor Julianus, which is set during the Saturnalia, and describes a divine banquet and an oratorical contest among the Caesars. Aside from Plato and Lucian's literary models of Symposia, it could well be that the anti-Claudian satire also played a suggestive part. Some of the formal analogies are striking, the most outstanding of these being Hermes's proclamation in anapaests.³⁵ Nothing more was heard of the *Apocolocyntosis* until it was cited at length in the preface³⁶ to *Vita Walae* by Radbert of Corbie (Paschasius Radbertus). This was several years after the death of Wala (d. 836), at the time of the first surviving manuscripts of the satire. Radbert does not, however, give the name of the author cited, and introduces the quotation thus: "*aut non legisti quid nuper attulit gentilium*

³³ "Agrippina's mushroom would be less harmful, if she clasped an old man's chest and caused his waggling head and the saliva drooling from his lips to descend heavenward" (*Minus ergo nocens erit Agrippinae / boletus, siquidem unius praecordia pressit / ille senis tremulumque caput descendere iussit / in caelum et longa manantia labra saliva*).

³⁴ See *apocol.* chapters 7 (end) and 8.

³⁵ 318D–319D, cf. *apocol.* 12.3.

³⁶ This was a lengthy quotation, split between the protagonists of the dialogue, Adeodatus, and Paschasius. The section of Radbert's text following the direct quotation is redolent with expressions taken from a reading of the satire. The Radbert Codex is in the line of S, cf. Roncali 1970: 694.

thema?"³⁷ It had therefore been a recent acquisition, and the definition of the "literary genre" (*thema*) is also interesting.

The text was well known during the Middle Ages and the pre-humanist era. William of Malmesbury (ca. 1080–1142), the English historian, monk, and librarian at Malmesbury Abbey, cites and paraphrases hexameters from chapter 4 of the *Apocolocyntosis* in the *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 3.269, without giving the source. This is provided instead in the *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, 1.17, where the proverb *gallus in sterquilinio suo plurimum valet* (*apocol.* 7.3) is quoted, and 4.153, where Claudius's temple in Britannia is referred to (*apocol.* 8.3).

The testimonies of two writers and scholars are significant: Boccaccio and Petrarch. Boccaccio, in his *Comento alla Divina Comedia*, wrote that, according to some, Seneca had written a book which is "much more poetical than moral, and is in prose and verse, taking the form of a tragedy," and he adds: "although much it does not appear to me to be in his style, nevertheless I think that it is by him, given his passionate loathing for Claudius, for the injury received by him by being cast into exile" (II, p. 79 Guerri). Coluccio Salutati also knew the satire under the title of *Ludus de morte Claudii* and, like Boccaccio, he compared it to the tragedies (*Epist.* I, p. 151 Novati). Petrarch, on the other hand, in his preface to book II of *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, makes ample use of the passage in the satire that talks about philosophers and clocks (*apocol.* 2.2 f.), citing the author's name.

The humanists imitated Seneca's pamphlet with taste and literary skill, adapting it to suit literary and political polemic. Some of the most famous names are called to mind here. Erasmus of Rotterdam, who had returned to England after a three-year stay in Italy (1506–1509), wrote the declamation *Moriae encomium* (Praise of Folly), drawing his inspiration from *magni auctores*, including "Seneca, cum Claudii luserit ἀποθέωσιν."³⁸ Another instance of imitation is found in the dialogue attributed to Erasmus, which appeared anonymously on the death of Julius II, entitled *Dialogus viri cuiuspiam eruditissimi festivus sane ac elegans, quo Julius II P.M. post mortem coeli fores pulsando, ab janitore illo D. Petro intromitti nequiverit*.

³⁷ Edition by E. Dümmler, in: *Philos.-histor. Abhandlungen d. kgl. Akademie d. Wiss. zu Berlin* 1900, II, 20 f.

³⁸ The first edition was printed in Paris, by Gilles Gourmont (1509), and reprinted in August 1511 in Strasbourg, ed. by Matthias Schurer. The reference to Seneca comes in the preface, which, as in the 1519 edition (Basel), contains references to several ancient authors. In the 1515 edition (Basel), Synesius's treatise in praise of baldness and Seneca's *Ludus* were printed together, with Rhenanus' scholia.

Between the second half of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century, the genre of Menippean satires became widespread. Some of these, which are widely known, take their inspiration from Seneca's satire in regard to narrative structure, content, and numerous verbal similarities. They are written in Latin and include no small amount of Greek quotations. These are Justus Lipsius's *Satyra menippea sive Somnium: Lusus in nostri aevi criticos* (Antwerp 1581) and Petrus Cunaeus's *Sardi venales: Satyra menippea in huius seculi homines plerosque inepte eruditos* (Antwerp 1612, published with Iuliani Imp. *Satyra*). The imitation is reflected in the preface, the assembly of the gods, the oratorical style of the characters, the descent to Hades, and the alternation of prose and verse.

In France there was further proof of the satire's success. The *Satire Menippée*, written by various authors, was essentially political in nature and objective, a parody of the Etats Généraux, when the heads of state were summoned to an assembly in Paris by the League in late January 1593.³⁹ During the eighteenth century, there were various imitations, the recurrent themes being the council of the gods, the banishment from the selected divine society, the court, and the public debate on punishment. These imitations included Daniel Heinsius's operetta *Herculem tuam fidem*, Reinholdus Blomius's *Iudicium peripateticum*, and François Garasse, who refers to illustrious examples in his pamphlet protesting the Jesuit Père Coton: "*Aderant Iulianus et Seneca, quorum alter Caesares, alter unum Claudium incurbitaverat.*"⁴⁰ Finally, some little-known evidence as to the fortunes of the *Apocolocyntosis* is provided by the *Poematia quaedam Senecae philosophi ex Apocolocyntosi*, which can be found, between Aratus's *Phaenomena* and Petronius's *Satyricon*, in a noteworthy collection of Latin sacred and profane poetry, published in London in 1713 thanks to an English scholar of French origin and a "pioneer" of the history of printing, Michael Maittaire.⁴¹

³⁹ I recommend the short book: *Etudes sur la Satyre Menippée*, collected by F. Lestringant and D. Ménager (Geneva 1987), which includes interesting chapters on subjects common to the ancient examples.

⁴⁰ Smet 1994. The reuse of the satire—observes De Smet—is to be found in Henry Fielding, in Lord Byron (*The Vision of Judgement*) and Robert Musil (*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*).

⁴¹ Alfani 1999.

PART FIVE

OTHER WORKS

EPIGRAMS

Joachim Dingel

The authenticity of the epigrams attributed to Seneca has been challenged, yet there is sufficient evidence for accepting at least ten of them as genuine. In a number of manuscripts of the *Anthologia Latina* Seneca is named as the author of three poems whose content and language suit the tragedian and philosopher perfectly (Riese 1894: poems 232, 236, 237).¹ In the Vossianus two of these (236, 237) are placed at the beginning of a series of about seventy poems (396–463) whose themes and diction suggest Senecan origin as well. Since there are more indications in that manuscript that the series was transmitted as a unity,² Seneca's authorship must be taken into account for these epigrams, too, although the Vossianus does not name him. The Fuerstenfeldensis contains four items of the Vossianus grouping (447, 440, 437, 438), and among them another (804, following 440), which is not found in the Leiden manuscript.³ The *Epitaphium Senecae* (667) is transmitted separately, together with Seneca's prose works, tragedies, and apocryphal correspondence with St. Paul (Buonocore 2000: 99 f.; Flammini 2000: 103).

Binetus and Pithoeus were the first editors to see a manuscript in which one or two epigrams are ascribed to Seneca, and to publish these as Senecan poetry. Pithoeus attributed other poems to Seneca as well; Scaliger followed him in his own second edition. But their opinion did not prevail; there were always believers and sceptics.⁴ The number of accepted Senecan poems was

¹ Riese's (1894) numbers are preferred to Shackleton Bailey's (1982) here. For the transmission of the *Anthology* cf. Kay 2006: 13–18; on the codices of the epigrams attributed to Seneca, see Zurlì and Scivoletto 2001: VII–XXXV; Dingel 2007: 13–17. The main manuscripts are Parisinus Lat. 10318 (Salmasianus, ca. AD 800), Parisinus Lat. 8071 (ninth century), Leidensis Vossianus Lat. Q. 86 (ninth century) and Monacensis Lat. 6911 (Fuerstenfeldensis, thirteenth/fourteenth century).

² In the manuscript the oversized heading of 236 + 237 *DE CORSICA* provides a hint, another is the recurrent heading *ITEM* of each of the poems 464–479 (which are plausibly attributed to Petronius, whereas the pieces which precede *De Corsica* date from late antiquity).

³ 238 + 238a (extant in the Salmasianus) and 414a (edited from the now lost Bellovacensis Bineti) are connected indirectly with the Vossianus series.

⁴ The history of the discussion is summed up in Armstrong 1998: 10–30. In the last decades the authenticity of some or all the poems in question was accepted by Grimal 1978a: 46 f. and 106, Shackleton Bailey 1982: VII, Schetter 1983: 363 n. 7, Courtney 2001: 60 n. 9, and others; denied

greatest in Baehrens's *Poetae Latini Minores* (1882). Since then, even optimists have become more guarded.⁵

To begin with the epigrams whose genuineness is well attested: *De qualitate temporis* (232) reflects upon "devouring" time and the end of the world, which will be brought about by *ekpyrosis* ("conversion into fire").⁶ This end is a central theme of Stoic philosophy, with which Seneca also deals in his prose works and tragedies (Gauly 2004: 235–266). His earliest extant treatment of the subject (*dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*], 26.6f.) is the most similar to the content of the epigram both in detail and structure. The philosopher makes of decline a consolation: since the whole world is approaching destruction, man's mortality is not to be lamented. This is also the meaning of 232.7 (*Lex est, non poena, perire*). However, the last verse of the poem is tinged with resignation: *Hic aliquo mundus tempore nullus erit*. The comforting belief in the renewal of the universe is also ignored, as it is in the *Consolatio ad Polybium* (*dial.* 11.1.2–4). Seneca may thus have written *epigr.* 232 a couple of years after his arrival on Corsica.

In any case, the unkind epigrams *De Corsica* (236, 237) reflect this situation clearly. As Ovid did in his elegies from exile, Seneca draws on laudatory common places in order to reverse them (Helzle 2003: 18). The first half of *epigr.* 236 praises the island (though with restraint): it was colonized by the Greeks, it is traversed by rivers teeming with fish. Unexpectedly, Corsica becomes *terribilis* in the second half of the poem; she is attacked because of her unbearably hot summers and sarcastically asked for mercy: *parce relegatis, hoc est iam parce sepultis: / vivorum cineri sit tua terra levis*.⁷ The opening of *epigr.* 237 is programmatic: *Barbara [...] Corsica*. The exile regrets, as Ovid did, the absence of the usual products of the four seasons, omitting, however, the grapes. The omission accords with Seneca's needs (cf. *epist.* 108.16), but not with Ovid's.

Some of the seventy poems mentioned *supra* harmonize in style and content with *De qualitate temporis* and *De Corsica*; in all probability they, too, are by Seneca. In *De se ad patriam* (409) the exile asks his native place to

by Fuhrmann 1997 (1999): 97f., Holzberg 2004: *passim*, Breitenbach 2009 and others. Many scholars avoid a decision, e.g., Griffin 1992: 45 n. 5, Canali and Galasso 1994: 7, Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1995: 226.

⁵ Scepticism has been promoted much by Bardon's article from 1939.

⁶ *Tempus edax* after Ov. *Pont.* 4.10.7; cf. *met.* 15.234. The superscriptions of the poems date from Late Antiquity or the Middle Ages; they are cited here merely for easier identification.

⁷ The notion of the exile as a dead man is one of Ovid's as well, cf., e.g., Ov. *trist.* 3.11.25f., *Pont.* 1.9.17f. Seneca also has it in *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*) 1.3; *epigr.* 409.2.

lament his “death,” being Cordoba’s greatest misfortune ever, worse than the hardships of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, worse than being conquered after Munda (45 BC) or threatened by the Lusitanians (147–139 BC). But there is a consolation in this calamity: Cordoba being far away, she will be reached by the sad message late and thus gain some happiness. The idea of Seneca’s exile being the worst calamity in the history of his birthplace has a counterpart in the *Consolatio ad Helviam*. There the philosopher represents his banishment as the greatest affliction his mother had undergone (*dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*].2.4–3.1). In his poem the speaker’s metaphorical death evokes the real death of Tibullus, for vv. 3 (*Nunc longinqua tuum deplora, Corduba, vatem*) and 13f. (*Ille tuus quondam magnus, tua gloria, civis / infigor scopulo*) are reminiscences of *Ov. am.* 3.9.5f.: *Ille tui vates operis, tua fama, Tibullus / ardet in exstructo corpus inane rogo*. This is especially remarkable in so far as Seneca also describes himself as a *vates* (i.e., tragedian?).

In *De fratris filio parvulo* (441) the speaker wishes that his elder brother (Annaeus Novatus, Iunius Gallio after his adoption) and his younger one (Annaeus Mela) may survive him, and little Marcus (Lucan) become an orator able to challenge his uncles: *facundo patruos provocet ore duos*. These wishes are introduced by *sic*, that is to say that they shall come true if a certain condition is fulfilled. What the condition is the modern reader does not learn, because this section of the poem has been lost. Since (1) its first couplet speaks of death and funeral and (2) there is a parallel to the *Consolatio ad Helviam* again (*dial.* 12.18.4–6), it is plausible to date this epigram to the period of Seneca’s exile as well.

Ad amicum optimum (405) praises a powerful man called Crispus, who was the speaker’s defender in the past and may be his rescuer in the future.⁸ It is highly probable that the speaker is Seneca, and that he is also the author. A strong argument for Senecan origin is the way in which the rocky exile is spoken of. In *De amico mortuo* (445, hendecasyllabi) this same Crispus is praised and mourned, obviously by the same poet. The last verse, *Plus quam dimidium mei recessit*, takes up the famous Horatian phrase *animae dimidium meae* (*carm.* 1.3.8). In all probability the Crispus of the two poems is C. Sallustius Crispus Passienus (*cos. II AD 44*), who was married to Agrippina the Younger until his death.

⁸ On 405.8 (*cuius Cecropio pectora melle madent*) Martial seems to have modelled 7.69.2: *cuius Cecropia pectora dote madent*. At least this assumption is more attractive than the reverse, since *Cecropio melle*, because of the famous Attic honey and the common place ‘sweetness’ of speech, is less recherché than *Cecropia dote*.

The speaker's wish to live a modest life in leisure and tranquility is varied in three epigrams (433, 440 and 804), which draw on the doctrine of Epicurus and its adaptation by Horace.⁹ *De quieta vita* (804) points to Seneca's authorship most clearly, as it mentions the speaker's brothers and, in v. 9, also his writing poetry (*Pauperis arva soli securaque carmina curem*). It is not easy to say at what time of his life Seneca may have written these poems. If the words *alios praetura sequatur* (v. 3) are meant in their strict sense, the speaker is pondering breaking off the *cursus honorum* (Seneca became praetor after exile). There are two epigrams that have a related theme: *Memoria litteras permanere* (417, 418).¹⁰ They suit a man who took refuge with the muses for some time. It is more likely than not that these are also by Seneca.¹¹

Another possibility for recommending a philosophic mode of life—viz. by condemning its opposite—is applied in *De divitiis et inhonesto animo* (443 and 444 [*De eodem*, hendecasyllabi]). Both epigrams censure luxury and avarice and—the former implicitly, the latter expressly—oppose these to true happiness. It is attractive to ascribe them to Seneca, since their theme is of enormous interest to him, and parallels to his tragedies and prose works are numerous. They could be dated to any period of his life as a writer.

In five poems the speaker gives warnings to his adversaries (who cannot be identified by modern readers): *Parcendum misero* (396), *De custodia sepulchri* (410), *In eum qui maligne iocatur* (412.1–12 and 412.13–18),¹² *Ad malivolum* (416). They combine vague entreaties with obscure threats (e.g., *Desere confossum. Victori vulnus iniquo / mortiferum impressit mortua saepe manus*: 396.3f.). There are arguments in favor of Seneca's authorship and nothing to rule it out.

The epigrams *De vita humiliori* (407, 408) advise against making friends. They display the kind of individualism that is found in the *Epistulae Morales*.¹³ Again, there are good reasons to accept Seneca's authorship.

There are certain poems, however, whose Senecan origin can be denied with some confidence. A diatribe against *Spes* (415) differs from Seneca's thought and diction (but may have been written before AD 100). A pastoral scene (238–238a) can be assigned to Late Antiquity according to its imagery

⁹ Cf. especially *carm.* 2.16, 2.18 and 3.1; in Seneca: *Thy.* 336–403.

¹⁰ *Memoriam litteris permanere* (as conjectured by Riese) would be more fitting.

¹¹ There are striking parallels to Sen. *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*) 18.2.

¹² The unity of 412 was suspected early, but editors before Shackleton Bailey hesitated to give it up.

¹³ Cf., e.g., Sen. *epist.* 10.1: *Sic est, non muto sententiam: fuge multitudinem, fuge paucitatem, fuge etiam unum.*

and language, and so can a eulogy on three friends (428). The *Epitaphium Senecae* (667), which fits any dignitary, has a Christian ring and is also late.¹⁴

The panegyric cycle *Laus Caesaris* (419–426) was certainly composed in AD 43 or 44. It glorifies the conquest of Britain by the Roman emperor.¹⁵ There are three recurrent notions: (1) “Britain was never conquered before,” (2) “Britain is subdued now” and/or “Britain is now under Roman rule,” and (3) “The ocean has become part of the Roman Empire.”¹⁶ Monotony, however, is avoided by varying the details. For example, the addressees of the epigrams vary: the emperor (419), Britannia (422), Mars, Quirinus, Julius Caesar and Augustus (424), and so on. Senecan origin of the cycle can be maintained in spite of the fact that 47.6% of its pentameters have trisyllabic or polysyllabic endings, as opposed to 16.6% in the entire corpus (Dingel 2007: 40). The discrepancy is partly due to some preeminent words: *imperium*, *Oceanus* (thrice each); in 426.6 (*praeifulget stellis Arctos inocciduus*) the rare adjective *inocciduus* is perhaps a quotation from the *Aratea* of Germanicus, meant to be noticed by the emperor, who was Germanicus’s brother.¹⁷ However that may be, a cycle of forty-two lines is presumably too short for reliable statistics.

Many poems of the corpus treat themes from Greek and Roman history. Some of them suggest Senecan origin. The epigrams dealing with Cato’s death (397–399), for example, are in accord with Seneca’s style and treatment of the theme; they must be either by him or an admirer of his (and of Cato’s), such as Lucan.¹⁸ Six epigrams (400–401, 402, 403, 454–456) exploit the fact that Pompey and his two sons Gnaeus and Sextus were buried in Africa, Europe, and Asia respectively. This idea is also developed in Seneca (*dial.* 11 [= *cons. Pol.*].15.1) and Lucan (6.817 f.) and, with one or two of the persons changed, in Petronius (120, vv. 61–66: Crassus, Pompey, Caesar) and Seneca again (*epist.* 71.9: Pompey, Cato, Cn. Pompeius the Younger). It is probable that these poems date from the Neronian period and possible that Seneca wrote them.

¹⁴ Otherwise, e.g., Flammini 2000: 108–112.

¹⁵ Seneca watched the campaign with a personal interest, cf. *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*).13.2: *Hic [i.e. Claudius] Germaniam pacet, Britanniam aperiat, et paternos triumphos ducat et novos; quorum me quoque spectatorem futurum, quae ex virtutibus eius primum optinet locum, promittit clementia.*

¹⁶ The second and third ideas are present in the *Apocolocyntosis* (12.3) as well.

¹⁷ Cf. Germ. 63 f.: *Oceani tumidis ignotae fluctibus Arctoe, / semper inocciduus servantes ignibus axem.* Perhaps Seneca sent these epigrams to an influential person in Rome, hoping that they would be shown to the emperor. Since the poems of an exile would not have been recited in public, Seneca’s authorship has to be denied by those scholars who suggest a public recital (Barrett 2000: 604–606).

¹⁸ Cf., e.g., Sen. *epist.* 70.19, 71.8. Martial’s attitude towards Cato was different, cf. Mart. 1.8.

Epigrams 402 and 456 are connected with Mart. 5.74 (*Pompeios iuvenes Asia atque Europa, sed ipsum / terra tegit Libyes* etc.). It cannot be deduced from the wording of the epigrams whether Martial's is earlier or later. The poems dealing with the history of Greece focus on the country's glorious past. *De Athenis* (411), which may be by Seneca, laments the decline of Athens and Mycenae, ending thus: *Magnarum rerum parva sepulchra vides*.¹⁹

The corpus also contains erotic poetry, either sentimental or satirical. This is especially interesting, because in antiquity "frivolous little verses" (*versiculi severi parum*) were ascribed to Seneca, as is attested by Pliny the Younger, who judged them to be genuine (*epist.* 5.3.2–5).²⁰ Perhaps some of them are in the transmitted collection. It is even possible that Seneca wrote some of them if only to demonstrate his exceptional talent.

¹⁹ Famous cities destroyed or reduced to insignificance were an important literary subject in that epoch (Dingel 2007: 163).

²⁰ Seneca's *leviora studia* in exile must be remembered as well (*dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*].20.1).

DE VITA PATRIS

Michael Winterbottom

Thanks to the deciphering of the lower text in a palimpsested manuscript,¹ we possess a number of fragments of Seneca's lost prose works, among them the beginning of a life of his father. It is natural to suppose that Seneca wrote it soon after his father's death (see Schanz and Hosius 1935: 707), which took place some time after Gaius became emperor in AD 37. It is clear from the first words that it was intended as a work of encomium as well as of biography: "If I had by now put forth all that my father composed and wished to be published, he would himself have seen to establishing the brilliance of his name." That is, his father's work, had it yet been given to the world, would have been sufficient to secure his fame. Seneca, for some reason (perhaps his exile) unable as yet to see to the publication, set himself to write a life, a work of filial affection (*nisi me decipit pietas*), which would have some of the same effect. Equally, it would satisfy the curiosity of eventual readers of his father's "Histories," who would wish to know of his background.

The older man had been born, around 50 BC, in Cordoba in southern Spain. He was of equestrian stock; hence the suggestion in our fragment that he might be "ennobled" by his talent as a writer. He became well known to posterity because of the preservation of his work on declamation, and it is possible that his son was responsible for publishing this after his death, for he speaks of "*all* that my father composed." But later in the fragment, attention is concentrated on a now lost historical work, covering the period from the start of the civil wars (that is, presumably, from the 40s BC) to shortly before the author's death. His son may indeed have had the book published. Suetonius, in his *Life of Tiberius* (73.2), adduces "Seneca" as authority for an anecdote about the emperor's death. More importantly, the church father Lactantius (*inst.* 7.15.14–16) tells how "Seneca" compared the history of Rome to the Ages of Man. But we cannot be sure that these passages do not refer to lost works of the younger Seneca.²

¹ Vatican, Pal. lat. 24 (*Codices Latini Antiquiores* I. 69): f. 43 (s. iii/iv); see further Fohlen 1979: 211–212. Text: Studemund 1888: xxxi–xxxii, reprinted in Vottero 1998: 210 (= F 97).

² The bibliography is extensive; see Lausberg 1989: 1937–1941.

PART SIX

SYNTHESIS

SENECA'S LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Michael von Albrecht

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE AND STYLE TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SENECA

There are excellent studies on Seneca's language and style.¹ Since the present overview cannot cover every detail, it will concentrate on some aspects relevant to Seneca's literary and philosophical intentions.

"Studied Negligence"

Seneca's ideas on the study of language and style as an aim in itself are clear (*epist.* 108.35):² "We should not hunt out archaic or far-fetched words and eccentric metaphors and figures of speech, but [...] we should seek precepts (*praecepta*) which will help us, utterances of courage and spirit (*magnificas voces et animosas*) which may at once be turned into facts. We should so learn that words may become deeds." Lists of rare words or figures of speech would certainly not find Seneca's approval. His averseness to "irrelevant pursuits" is not limited to philology (*epist.* 88.42): "Think how much superfluous and unpractical matter the philosophers contain! Of their own accord they have also descended to establishing nice divisions of syllables and determining the true meaning of conjunctions and prepositions [...]; the result is that they know more about careful speaking than about careful living" (cf. also *epist.* 48.4 f.; 106.11). Such remarks (taken at face value) must have provoked Quintilian (*inst.* 10.1.129) to label Seneca as *in philosophia parum diligens*. It is equally true, however, that Seneca in his later letters is gradually approaching

¹ Style is understood here as the literary (and philosophical) use of linguistic means. Basic are Traina 1987 (1995); Setaioli 1985, 1988, and 2000; and Hine 2005; for the tragedies: Billerbeck 1988, Seidensticker 1969; for Seneca's imagery: Armisen-Marchetti 1989; for the problem of a style typical of the Neronian epoch: Setaioli 1985: 818–821.

² Loeb translations (Cambridge, Mass.) were gratefully used, but not always followed literally. *Epist.*: Gummere 1917–1925 (and repr.); *moral essays*: Basore 1928–1935 (and repr.); *nat. quaest.*: Corcoran 1971–1971; *tragedies*: Fitch 2003, vol. 1 (= F); and Miller 1917, 2 vols. (= M).

dialectics and insisting on the indispensability of theoretical insight—even in the field of ethics. On closer inspection, Seneca's readers discover that, in matters of philosophy as in matters of style, if there is negligence, Seneca's negligence is a studied one.

Word and Self-Education

Of course, Seneca is fully aware of the importance of language and style as instruments of philosophical education. His use of linguistic means is conditioned by oral performance. "Throughout antiquity books were written to be read aloud, and [...] even private reading often took on some of the characteristics of a modulated declamation."³ Seneca's tragedies were read aloud in any case—no matter whether they were acted on the stage or only "recited." No less important is the acoustic dimension in his philosophical writings (a group of which is explicitly called *dialogi*⁴ in our manuscript tradition), and especially in the *letters*, which, according to epistolary theory, are one half of a conversation.⁵ In fact, the transposition of some features of orality into a literary form lends the *Epistles to Lucilius* a special charm. What is more, Seneca's prose often echoes a philosopher's dialogue with himself (even lonely meditation was put into audible words in antiquity).⁶ The importance of language and style (and of rhetorical structures of thought) to philosophical self-education comes to the fore in his philosophical texts.

Form and Content: The Context

Each word or phrase is no predetermined entity; its meaning is largely conditioned by context. This is especially true for authors writing dialogues (Plato, for example) or adopting a style relatively close to dialogue (such as Seneca, whose own views on language and style call for a reading of that kind). In the past, some scholars neglected the fact that Seneca was writing in Latin and were satisfied to find Greek sources and parallels; today, in the light of a critical approach to language, philosophical readers become increasingly aware of the difficulty of separating philosophical thought from the linguistic

³ Kenney 1982: 11.

⁴ According to Griffin 1992: 412–415 *dialogi* refers to *sermocinatio* as a technique within a work and it might have been used for all the prose works "aside from the letters" (see, however, *supra*) "and speeches."

⁵ Cf. Sen. *epist.* 75.1; 67.2; letters as "one half of a dialogue" (τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ διαλόγου): Artemo, quoted by Demetrius, *De elocutione* 223; cf. Cic. *Q. fr.* 1.1.45.

⁶ Rabbow 1954, Hadot 1969, and Hadot 1987.

(and even the literary) form adopted by a given philosopher; so the time may be right for a fresh appraisal of Seneca's language and style.

Short Sentences: An Anti-Cicero?

Seneca's concise style—which fatigues the reader only if enjoyed to excess—is meant to satisfy the Stoic ideal of *brevitas*.⁷ However, many short sentences may accumulate and grow into rather long letters and even books. In both groups of works, the syntax of the individual sentence is mostly straightforward and simple (for telling exceptions, see “Variation, differences of style,” *infra*, p. 709). Even so, paragraphs are carefully linked internally by both verbal correspondences and figures of thought. Hence, Caligula's description of Seneca's style as “sands without lime” (*harenam esse sine calce*: Suet. *Cal.* 53.3) is inaccurate.

Seneca's style is janus-faced. In his day, he was *en vogue* among young people although that “modern style” had already been around for 100 years.⁸ Under Augustus, teachers of rhetoric had cultivated a diction rich in short, rhythmical sentences, with an epigrammatic turn in both content and form. Seneca is the heir to this tradition, which ultimately hearkens back to the breathless colometry of Asian rhetoric and to the aggressiveness of Cynic diatribe. His mockery of Cicero earned him harsh censure from defenders of traditional Latin such as Gellius (12.2.1–14) and from a guardian of classical style, such as Quintilian, who, while grudgingly acknowledging Seneca's talent, deplored his lack of self-control (*inst.* 10.1.125–131). Sometimes Seneca shows a more severe taste than Cicero, however, in his sparing use of “poetic” vocabulary in prose.⁹ As for Seneca's Latin, modern scholarship has shown that his language is less un-Ciceronian than one might have expected, even surprisingly pure.¹⁰ “Despite some licenses (e.g., in the use of tenses) it can be said that Seneca's language presents an overall picture of the greatest grammatical correctness and in several respects is more correct than, for instance, Cicero's.”¹¹

In other respects, too, the gulf between Cicero and Seneca is less vast than one would expect. Senecan passages showing that our philosopher was not blind to Cicero's merits should no longer be neglected. Seneca knew,

⁷ Stoic brevity is criticized by Cicero, *Brut.* 120.

⁸ Quint. *inst.* 10.1.126; cf. Suet. *Cal.* 53.3; Tac. *ann.* 13.3.

⁹ Hine 2005.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Norden 1958, 306–314, esp. the footnote on pages 313 f.; Hine 2005.

¹¹ Axelson 1939: 11.

used, and appreciated Cicero's works (even the *Hortensius* that has not come down to us).¹² He quotes Cicero as the authority for the Latinization of a philosophical term (*epist.* 58.6). What is more, he acknowledges Cicero's stylistic achievement, e.g. (*epist.* 100.7): "Read Cicero: his style has unity; it moves with a modulated pace, and is gentle without being degenerate. The style of Asinius Pollio, on the other hand, is 'bumpy,' jerky, leaving off when you least expect it. And finally, Cicero always stops gradually while Pollio breaks off, except in the very few cases where he cleaves to a definite rhythm and a single pattern." Here, Cicero, as the "greatest author," is assigned a place of honor—before Asinius Pollio, Livy, and Seneca's own teacher Fabianus. In the same passage, Seneca praises Cicero's *prose rhythm*. Actually, he prefers the same *clausulae*; however, instead of building long Ciceronian "periods," he splits up his sentences into small units (*cola*). For this reason, Seneca is often called an "anti-Cicero,"¹³ a representative of the "pointed manner" adverse to the periodic style cherished by the famous orator. This view is too simplistic. Cicero himself used long periods only in certain genres and in certain contexts where such a style was appropriate;¹⁴ in his letters and even in his late orations, we find an abruptness and directness that defies the idea of the "wordy Cicero" of our textbooks.

"Poetic" Vocabulary

"Each word must be considered in its own merits."¹⁵ Some words known to us from poetry and absent from Seneca's prose are occasionally found in Cicero's.¹⁶ When searching for poetic words in Seneca's prose, however, one

¹² To give an example, in Letter 102.16 Seneca got the quotation *Laus alit artis* ("Praise nurtures the arts," from Ennius, *Annales*, Book 16) through Cicero's *Hortensius*. There are points of contact between Seneca's *Epistulae*, his (fragmentary) *Exhortationes*, and the *De philosophia* with the *Hortensius*. Reminiscent of the *Hortensius* (and the protreptic tradition) are other images and expressions: Sen. *epist.* 90.7 *vivaria piscium* [...]; 71.31 (the coloring of wool); 17.2 *ut Ciceronis utar verbo, opituletur (philosophia)*; *epist.* 89.1; 49.5; 16.1 f.; *epist.* 88 (liberal arts); criticism of bad teachers *epist.* 108.23.: Grilli 2002: 204, Mazzoli 1964.

¹³ After many others, Möller 2004: 167: "Ciceros stilistischer Widersacher"; cf. v. Albrecht 1971 [1995]: esp. 149–151, and 1989: 123 f.

¹⁴ v. Albrecht 2003a: 1, 189, and other instances.

¹⁵ Hine 2005: 224.

¹⁶ An example is *nati* (Cic. *Lael.* 27; *fin.* 5.65); *caelites* (used by Seneca only in his tragedies) is attested in Masinissa's prayer (Cic. *rep.* 6.9), a passage rich in archaisms. *Genitor* (lacking in Seneca's prose) is found twice in Cicero's *Timaeus*. Cicero uses *serpens* and *anguis*, Seneca in his prose writings only *serpens*. *Ales* is not rare in Seneca's tragedies, but he avoids it in his prose, even in an augural context (*nat.* 2.32–34), whereas Cicero applies the same word even in a non-technical meaning (*nat. deor.* 2.101). Cicero describes *effari* as old (*De orat.* 3.153); he

should keep in mind that (unlike, for instance, *verba prisca*—"archaisms"—, which is an established term) *verba poetica* is a category unknown to the ancients. Modern research has done much to narrow down the alleged influence of "poetic vocabulary" on Silver Latin prose.¹⁷

From the lists compiled in older publications, some words must be eliminated, since they are found in prose before Seneca.¹⁸ In a seminal article, Hine (2005: 212 f.) shows first that some further words, although not attested in prose before Seneca, may be neutral, not specifically poetic; second, some words that originally did have a poetic coloring might have lost this nuance at a later stage of the Latin language; third, the choice of a poetic word may be favored by a specific context; fourth, if we consider only poetic words appearing in Seneca's prose for the *first* time, poeticisms incorporated by earlier prose writers escape us; fifth, since ante-Ciceronian literature has survived mostly in fragments, we know far less about Cicero's background than about Seneca's, hence, the impression that poetic words are more frequent in Silver Latin prose may be (Hine 2005: 213) "a mirage generated by the accidents of survival of Latin literature."

To exclude randomness, Hine considers only the 160 words that occur three times or more in verse before Seneca. Verbs with prefixes are generally shown not to be specifically poetic (216 f.). Of other derivatives, those in *-men*

uses it in a religious context (*dom.* 141), once in the letters and several times in the treatises. The imperative *effare* is frequent in Seneca's tragedies; other forms come up only occasionally. This verb is absent from his prose, except for the philosophical term *effatum*, which he quotes from other sources not without proposing alternatives (*enuntiatum*, *dictum*: *epist.* 117.13). *Fari* is part of an idiomatic phrase in Cicero's early oration *Pro Quinctio* 71 (*ne fando quidem*); furthermore, there are two instances in the philosophical works. In Seneca, this verb is strictly limited to the tragedies. Cicero uses the noun *questus* once in the *Pro Quinctio*, in Seneca it appears only in the tragedies. *Ductor*, which in Seneca is confined to the dramatic works, is attested in Cicero once in a speech and once in a philosophical writing. Another word rarely found in prose is *heu*. In Cicero (*Phil.* 7.14) it is part of the standard phrase *heu me miserum*. Seneca uses *heu* exclusively in his poetry; the only exception (*benef.* 7.5.2) confirms the rule: there *heu* is part of a quotation from Virgil. *Gradior* (three times in Cicero's philosophical works) and *immitis* (only once in a letter to Atticus) are entirely limited to poetic texts in Seneca (*prov.* 5.11 is a quotation from Ovid). *Coniugium* (used by Seneca only in his tragedies) appears thirteen times in Cicero's orations and once in a letter; in his philosophical works the orator uses both *matrimonium* and *coniugium*. *Famulus* and *-a* (generally rare in prose, and absent from Seneca's prose writings) occur in Cicero's *De legibus* (in archaizing laws). *Aetherius* (attested in Seneca only in his tragedies) is not rejected by Cicero in *De natura deorum*; it will come back in prose only in Apuleius.

¹⁷ Hine 2005; the present overview is much indebted to his study of "poetic" vocabulary.

¹⁸ *Barbaricus*, *cacumen*, *degener*, *flavescere*, *inextricabilis*, *mulcere*, *percussus*, *pererrare*, *vivax*; Braschi (1990: 99) quotes the following "poetic" words found in the *Letters to Lucilius*: *dissilire* (*epist.* 71.9 and 72.3), *desaevire* (15.8), and *dehiscere* (30.2). For a criticism of the fuller lists found in Summers (1913: lii) and Bourguery (1922b: 223–243), see Hine 2005.

(except for old words like *agmen*, *carmen*, *nomen*, etc.) are mostly poetic; in fact, Seneca uses *gestamen* only once (*benef.* 3.37.1), and in an elevated context (with reference to Aeneas).

Certain words that are deemed poetic are actually part of the technical language: *letal* occurs eleven times in earlier verse and only once in Seneca's prose (*letal* *aqua* "lethal water": *nat.* 3.21.1). It is found after a poetic quotation, but in a scientific context. Since Pliny also often uses the same word in medical contexts, it can be considered part of the considerable presence of medical¹⁹ vocabulary in Seneca.²⁰ As for loanwords that first appear in prose in Seneca, they are all technical words, and some of them (*adamas*, *lyricus*, *sistrum*) have no synonyms. *Cathedra*, *machaera*, *mannus* do have synonyms, but are technical in flavor, and their effect is "specific" rather than typically poetic.²¹ *Fulvus* ("orange-colored") is frequently used in earlier verse, but color terms are generally more common in verse than in prose (André 1949: 265); in the relevant passages (*nat.* 1.10.1; 1.14.2), Seneca was clearly more interested in the exact shade of color than in poetic flavor. *Opacus* (an adjective never common in prose writers) appears in the tragedies several times, but Seneca uses *opacitas* twice in his prose so the absence of the adjective from his prose may be accidental. The verb *meare* is frequent in poetry, and first appears in prose in Seneca. Here it always describes the motion of heavenly bodies (*dial.* 12 [= *cons. Helv.*] 8.6; *nat.* 7.10.2) or elements (2.17.1; 2.21.3; 6.14.1). This seems to be technical usage in his day (Cicero used *commeo* and, once, *remeo* in such contexts). Another instance is *impos sui* ("having no control over himself": *epist.* 83.10 and *Ag.* 117).²² Possibly this archaism is conditioned by traditional *iuncturae* (such as *impos animi* or *impos mentis*) and reflects established juridic usage.²³

¹⁹ Migliorini 1997; cf. also Armisen-Marchetti 1989: 347; v. Albrecht 2004: 27–29.

²⁰ In his tragedies, Seneca prefers *letificus* (*Med.* 577; cf. *Herc. O.* 208 *letifer*), while *mortifer* is standard in Cicero's and Seneca's prose.

²¹ The absence of some animal names (*cicada*, *damma*) and botanical terms (*palmes*) from earlier prose is accidental (cf. Columella; Pliny); the same is true for a technical term such as *laqueare* (Cicero uses the adjective *laqueatus*; Hine 2005: 221). *Ceu* (appearing in Seneca only once: *nat.* 6.24.4) is surprising, but the alternative reading, [Z] *quemadmodum*, looks like a gloss or a stopgap (Hine 2005: 222 with lit.); this old word, however, is often used by Pliny the Elder, and may have enjoyed a revival at that moment. One might add that the word is found in a quotation; it is not part of Seneca's active vocabulary.

²² Billerbeck (1988: 24f.) thinks of rhythmic reasons, Hine (2005: 224) deems *impos* "stronger" than *impotens*.

²³ As for *contagio*—*contagium*, in this group of words, the forms in -um are much rarer than those in -o (Leumann 1977: 294). Seneca avoids *obsidium* and *oblivium*, whereas *obsidio* (6 times) and *oblivio* (27 times) appear in his prose. *Contagium* is found once in Seneca (the first

As for differences between the writings and the plays, there are over 150 words that occur three or more times in Seneca's tragedies and never in his prose (many of them typically poetic, e.g., adjectives in *-fer* and *-ger*). Of forty-eight words found seven or more times in the tragedies and never in the prose, seventeen are absent both from Cicero's and from Seneca's prose. Thirteen of these are "poetic" indeed;²⁴ they all have valid synonyms in prose. No exact synonyms are available for *thyrsus*, *pharetra*, or *iuvencus*; so there is no need to consider them poetic. *Insons* is found in the historians and the *Digest*; its archaic sound may have appealed to the poets (Seneca uses this word only in the tragedies).

The absence of some other words from Seneca's prose is accidental: *regina*, *nurus*, *socia*, *habena*, *isthmus* (in the context of Corinth), *plaustrum*, *puppis* (in his prose, Seneca never refers to the "poop of a ship"; in poetry the word means simply "ship"), *gena*, *mala*, *maxilla*. Some words common in earlier prose are not found in Seneca's (they may have looked slightly old-fashioned to him): *haud* (absent from the *Ad Herennium*, Varro, and Cicero's correspondents), *expromo*, *abnuo* (these three appear, however, in the tragedies), *arbitror*, *interea*, *siquidem*.

Cicero uses *letum* ("death," a poetic word) when reporting from an earlier historian a prophetic dream of C. Gracchus (*div.* 1.56) and in a letter when making mock-heroic jokes about Antony (*Att.* 10.10.5). In Seneca's dramas the word occurs frequently, in his prose it is found only once (*nat.* 6.2.8): there, *ignobile letum* ("un-heroic death") alludes to Horace (*nobile letum: carm.* 1.12.36). *Proles* is an elevated word; in Cicero it appears in a sublime context (*rep.* 6.23). Seneca uses it twenty-four times in his tragedies and only once in his prose (*dial.* 11 [= *cons. Pol.*] 9.7): here the style is lofty and the text refers to the emperor.

To be brief, with regard to differences of vocabulary between his prose and poetry,²⁵ Seneca's practice is not significantly different from Cicero's.²⁶ Both reject excessive archaism and poeticism as well as exclusive use of everyday language (*epist.* 114.13–14). Seneca's use of many terms formerly considered

extant occurrence of the singular), Curtius, Pliny, and later (the plural *contagia* is preferred by poets for its metrical convenience, but Ennius and Plautus use *contagio* as well).

²⁴ Hine 2005: 226–229: *ensis*, *femineus*, *forsan*, *gressus*, *iubar*, *latex*, *ligo*; *antrum*, *boreas*, *notus* (wind from south), *polus*, *pontus* ("sea," not "Black Sea"), *thalamus*.

²⁵ Words used in Seneca's tragedies at least ten times more frequently than in his prose: *astrum*, *castus*, **chaos*, *cio*, **daps*, *dolus*, *en*, *geminus*, *infandus*, **infaustus*, **lacer*, *laevus*, *letum*, *libro*, *macto*, *nefandus*, **niveus*, *perimo*, **planctus*, *proles*, *queo*, *ratis*, *sceptrum*, **sospes*, *victrix* (asterisks mark words that are absent from Cicero's prose).

²⁶ Norden 1958: 286 f., Hine 2005: 236 f.

“poetic” can often be explained by his striving for precision. This is true for medical,²⁷ gastronomic, economic, financial, and nautical vocabulary. The use of technical vocabulary gives Seneca’s imagery a precision that helps the student of philosophy to enliven and intensify the contents of his teaching (see “Vividness, imagery,” *infra*, pp. 708f.).

As for philosophical vocabulary (cf. *epist.* 58.6), Seneca uses the artificial word *essentia* to render the Greek word οὐσία and he relies for this on Cicero’s authority. In the later group of letters, abstract Latin nouns appear as “calques” for their Greek equivalents. To give an example, in a paraphrase of Posidonius’s teachings, abstract Latin nouns pullulate (*praeceptionem* [...] *suasionem* [...] *consolationem* [...] *exhortationem* [...] *causarum inquisitionem*: *epist.* 95.65). The first of these nouns is duly excused (“there is nothing to prevent my using this word”); this shows that (given the reluctance of Latin to abstract philosophical terms) the word might have sounded slightly unfamiliar to Seneca’s readers; on the other hand, the last term of the series (*causarum inquisitionem*) is only quoted to be replaced with the original Greek word (*aetiologian*), which evidently had become part of the Latin vocabulary (“since the scholars who mount guard over the Latin language thus use the term as having the right to do so”). Hence, Seneca’s attitude regarding technical terms is undogmatic: he ventures a *calque* when the result does not offend Roman ears, but he uses the Greek term when Latin-writing scholars have accepted it. In both cases, he respects the linguistic usage of his day. Borgo (1998) has studied Seneca’s “moral” vocabulary both in his prose and drama.

*Greek: Translation as a Problem*²⁸

It is generally thought that before Humboldt nobody reflected on the different natures of languages and on the impossibility of translation in some cases.²⁹ These views are belied by a letter to Lucilius (58.7), in which Seneca discusses the problem of how to Latinize the Greek τὸ ὅν: “And you will condemn our narrow Roman limits even more, when you find out that there is a word of one syllable which I cannot translate. ‘What is this?’ you ask. It is the word ὅν. You think me lacking in facility; you believe that the word is ready to hand, that it might be translated by *quod est*. I notice, however, a great difference;

²⁷ Migliorini 1997.

²⁸ Setaioli (1988: esp. 11–46) quotes previous literature and deplores modern scholars’ neglect of Seneca’s reflections on the differences between Greek and Latin.

²⁹ Tsitsiou-Chelidoni 2002–2003; cf. also *epist.* 117.5 on verbal adjectives.

you are forcing me to render a noun by a verb (*verbum pro vocabulo ponere*). But if I must do so, I shall render it by *quod est*." The words *angustias Romanas* allude to the much-debated poverty³⁰ of Latin vocabulary; Seneca, however, discovers not only the limits of a single language, but, more generally, the impossibility of translation.

*Greek: Use of Expressions and Quotations*³¹

Unlike the philosophical writings, the *Menippea* quite easily allows insertion of Greek words and sentences into the Latin text—changes of language may occur within a sentence, even without the additional signals that usually accompany Latin quotations (such as *ut ait*). Lines from Homer marvelously suit the mock-heroic mode of the *Apocolocyntosis*.³² Further examples of Greek are the Epicurean definitions of "god," ironically applied to Claudius (*apocol.* 8.1).³³ (Tellingly in the same paragraph a *Latin* quotation is duly introduced with *ut ait Varro*.) Whenever the quoted Greek words form a strong unit, an inseparable "block," amusing tautologies become possible (*apocol.* 12.3): "a gigantic mega-chorus" (*ingenti* [...] *μεγάλῳ χορικῶ*). Such thoughtless repetitions occur in modern languages as well: "a good *bon mot*," "holy St. Florian."³⁴ Other current expressions are varied and distorted deliberately (*apocol.* 7.3): "a blow inflicted by the god" (*θεοῦ πληγὴν*) playfully becomes "a blow inflicted by the fool" (*μωροῦ πληγὴν*). The same substitution is presupposed (*apocol.* 8.3), when the inhabitants of Britain pray to Claudius wishing "to find a merciful—fool" (*μωροῦ εὐλότου τυχεῖν*). (On the philosophical use of lines from poetry see *infra*, pp. 720 f., 742).

Repetitions

Durs Grünbein judges Seneca's philosophical writings to be "pretty monotonous."³⁵ As Mutschler (1998) and Beck (2006: 432 f.) have shown, however, the numerous repetitions must be intentional. Since Seneca's readers—no

³⁰ On the poverty not only of Latin, but of human language more generally, *inopia sermonis*: *benef.* 2.34.4; cf. *epist.* 75.2; Setaioli 1988: 17.

³¹ Fucecchi 2003.

³² Allusions to Homer (paraphrased in Latin) are found in Seneca's philosophical writings, e.g., *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*) 19.2: *dum calet sanguis* (*Iliad* 11.477); cf. Abel 1986.

³³ Ἐπικούρειος θεὸς *non potest esse*: οὐτε αὐτὸς πρᾶγμα ἔχει τι οὔτε ἄλλοις παρέχει, cf. Epicurus apud Diog. Laert. 10.139.

³⁴ Binder 1987: vol. 2, 44 f.

³⁵ Grünbein 2004: 81.

professional philosophers, but busy Roman citizens—are exposed to the same troubles every day anew, the letters are intended as “daily lessons.” This is true on a general scale; in a narrower context, verbal repetitions have significant structural functions. Verbal repetition³⁶ (such as anaphora, for instance) is an important means to bind together Seneca’s prose: even sentence connection is established by repetition. Two examples of fourfold anaphora are found in *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*) 6.6–8: *contemnite paupertatem*: [...] *contemnite dolorem*: [...] *contemnite fortunam*: [...] *contemnite mortem*: [...] *sive* [...] *sive* [...] *sive* [...] *sive* [...]. The rhetorical verve of these series of sentences is especially appropriate in a final chapter, where some emotional appeal is expected. Such expandability and expansiveness is parried by the surprising brevity of the very last line of the book (brief cola of three, two, four, and two words), a contrast enhancing the impression of Catonian abruptness: *quidquid est, properat. Ecquid erubescitis? Quod tam cito fit, timetis diu?* This finale of the *De Providentia* shows that Seneca’s prose is more than a mere accumulation of short maxims: he knows that, on a larger scale, the effect of *brevitas* can be prepared and intensified by longer developments. The same happens on a smaller scale: within the short last line, the peremptory two-word sentences are preceded by slightly longer cola. The function of synonyms is comparable (see “Variation, differences of style” and “Style and self-persuasion,” *infra*, pp. 709 and 718 ff.). Another important device is antithesis (see *infra*, pp. 709 and 724).

*Vividness, Imagery*³⁷

Even in a letter developing the importance of theoretical insight (*epist.* 95), Seneca returns to his vivid style and gives graphic examples of dry definitions. His terms are: *descriptio cuiusque virtutis, ethologia, characterismos, iconismos* (95.65 f.). An example is Virgil’s portrait of the good horse (95.68 f.; Verg. *georg.* 3.75–85): “Virgil’s description, though referring to something else, might perfectly well be the portrayal of a brave man”. Other life-like images of virtue are Cato’s wound (95.72) and Tubero’s deliberately modest earthenware³⁸ (*vasa fictilia*: 95.73). Such impressive images placed at the end of a letter will stick in the addressee’s mind and accompany him during the day.

³⁶ Traina 1987 (1995): 31.

³⁷ Armisen-Marchetti 1989 is seminal.

³⁸ On this passage, see v. Albrecht 2004: 91–96.

Strikingly, the tragedies are not particularly rich in images.³⁹ "Philosophical" imagery is less frequent here. The tragedies revert to the tradition of the epic simile (for example, in messengers' reports) and to the imagery of fire more easily than the philosophical works, especially in the context of *furor*. Medical imagery is paramount in Seneca's prose, but much rarer in his dramas (248:14 instances); for nautical images the relation is 84:15, for financial ones, 150:2. Military comparisons are twelve times more frequent in the philosophical works than in the tragedies. All this is indicative of an artistic choice: the tragedies are not an instrument of "philosophical conversion."

Variation, Differences of Style

Seneca tries to keep his readers' attention awake by changing his means of expression: there is a great deal of variation in his use of synonyms, for example. Even on a larger scale, his prose style is less uniform than one might expect. There are generic differences. In the genre of *consolatio* and in some *prooemia*, the quasi-Ciceronian impression is due to Seneca's use of the florid "middle style," which is appropriate to the content. The introduction to the *Consolatio ad Helviam*, for example, is written in well-rounded periods, which perceptibly differ from the staccato style adopted in other works, where parataxis and antithesis dominate. However, even in this work Seneca's love of aphorism stands out. Having told us that twenty days after the death of Helvia's grandson her son was exiled, he goes on: "This misfortune you had still lacked—to mourn the living."⁴⁰ Even in the very first chapter a *bon mot* appears (1.3): Seneca hesitated to compose this work, since no book had ever been written to comfort those who would mourn the author.

There are differences of style within one and the same work. In the *De clementia*, Book 1 is rhetorical in character, and Book 2 is more abstract and philosophical. Correspondingly, there is a contrast between "common" and terminological use of vocabulary: in Book 1, *misericordia*, *venia*, *ignoscere* are synonyms for *clementia*; in Book 2, they are differentiated semantically. *Severitas* is an antonym to *clementia* in Book 1; in Book 2 they are ultimately identical, since both are virtues. Such metamorphoses within a longer work correspond to the gradual metamorphosis of the reader in the course of the reading process. We will come back to the importance of the philosophical redefinition of words (*infra*, pp. 729 f., 733 f., 737, 740 n. 122). For differences between the philosophical works and the tragedies, see *infra*, pp. 720 ff.

³⁹ Armisen-Marchetti 1989: 347 f.

⁴⁰ *Hoc adhuc defuerat tibi: lugere vivos* (*dial.* 11 [= *cons. Helv.*].2.5).

Colloquial versus Sublime Style

Seneca's style has been described in divergent, even contrary ways. On the one hand, Seneca's style might be compared to the *diatribes* of philosophical preachers; colloquialisms⁴¹ are in harmony with the personal tone of his prose works, their closeness to dialogue and epistolary style. Such elements are used with discretion, however. In the main, Seneca keeps aloof from "low style"; occasionally his diction even may border on the sublime. According to the anonymous author of the treatise "On sublimity" (Περὶ ὑψους, chapters 8 f.)—perhaps a contemporary of Seneca's—grand style springs from a great mind: *animus magnus* (cf. Sen. *epist.* 41, esp. 5). Rejection of trifling puerilities (τὸ μειρακιώδες) is a corollary to this.⁴² Sublimity is not achieved by unusual vocabulary, but by depth of ideas and seeming simplicity of form.

Artlessness?

It is true that Seneca praises the unpretentious writings of his teacher, Papirius Fabianus (*epist.* 100.9–11). In *epist.* 75.1 f. we read: "I prefer that my letters should be just what my conversation would be if you and I were sitting in one another's company or taking walks together—spontaneous and easy (*inlaboratus et facilis*⁴³); for my letters have nothing strained or artificial about them (*nihil habent accersitum nec fictum*). If it were possible, I should prefer to show (*ostendere*), rather than speak my feelings/opinions (*quid sentiam*).” However, it does not come as a surprise that in his literary practice Seneca is far from adopting Fabianus's unadorned style. According to the Stoic Cleanthes, an elevated subject matter requires an appropriate style.⁴⁴ Seneca agrees (*epist.* 75.3–5): "I prefer, however, that our conversation on matters so important should not be meager and dry; for even philosophy does not renounce the company of cleverness (talent, *ingenium*). One should not, however, bestow very much attention upon mere words [...]. If, however,

⁴¹ Setaioli 1980; 1981, cf. 2000: 9–95 with literature). Examples are: *homo* = French "on," "one"; *non concupiscendo* and similar forms almost in the function of participles (as in Italian); the intransitive ("medial") use of transitive verbs (*aperit* for *se aperit* or *aperitur*; *se ferunt* for *feruntur*). There are also colloquial uses of *facio* and occasional confusion of *alius* and *alter* or of *hic* and *iste*. But on the whole, the deviations from classical usage are neither frequent nor important. For further material, see Dionigi 1994: 5410–5412.

⁴² Cf. Möller 2004: 324. Even the narrative mode of messengers' reports in Seneca's tragedies is in harmony with Ps.-Longinus (Reitz 2006: 53).

⁴³ Hijmans 1976.

⁴⁴ *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* I 109,9 ff., *frg.* 186: only poetry can explain adequately the θεία μέγεθ.

you can attain eloquence without effort, and if you either are naturally gifted or can gain eloquence at slight cost, make the most of it and apply it to the noblest uses. But let it be of such a kind that it displays facts rather than itself (*ut res potius quam se ostendat*).⁴⁵ In any case, extremes should be avoided. On the one hand there is *inflata explicatio* (*epist.* 114.1). I do not think that Seneca is alluding here to the *genus grande*.⁴⁶ Actually, the *genus grande* prefers manly forcefulness to prolixity, verbosity, and over-explicitness. An inflated or turgid diction is typical of the florid “middle style.” The other extreme would be a style that is *infracta* (powerless) and resembles a theatrical monody (*canticum*) vulnerable to the objections of effeminacy and “childishness” (μειρακιῶδες).⁴⁶

Between Archaism and Everyday Speech

Moreover, style has no fixed laws; it is changed by the usage of the people—never the same for any length of time. Many orators hearken back to earlier epochs for their vocabulary, speaking in the language of the Twelve Tables. Gracchus, Crassus, and Curio, in their eyes, are too refined and too modern; so back to Appius and Coruncanius! Conversely, certain men, in their endeavor to maintain nothing but well-known and common usages, fall into a humdrum style (*sordes*). These two classes, each in its own way, are degenerate; and it is no less degenerate to use no words except those which are conspicuous, high-sounding, and poetical, avoiding what is familiar and in ordinary usage (*necessaria atque in usu posita*). (*epist.* 114.13f.)

Some examples of unobtrusive use of everyday speech may be mentioned here:⁴⁷ accumulated pronouns (*illas ipsas radices: dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].3.6); parenthetical *puto* (*epist.* 58.6; 76.11 twice, and frequently); an element of vividness is added by the “corrective” use of *immo* (one of many examples: *post fidem, immo per ipsam fidem: dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].3.7); in this passage, as in others, the effect is far from trivial, even highly emotional. The same is true for apostrophe (e.g., *dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].6 extr.). Such elements enliven Seneca’s prose style without impairing its dignity.

⁴⁵ I disagree with Möller 2004: 173 n. 716.

⁴⁶ Plutarch, *De liberis educandis*, Kap. 9 (= *mor.* 7 a); cf. also *Praecepta gerendae reip.* (= *mor.* 802); a pompous, tragic, and theatrical speech is as ineffective as a dry one.

⁴⁷ The closeness to philosophical preaching (*diatribe*) should be neither neglected nor overrated. Seneca’s style is dignified despite its vividness.

"Preacher's Style?" Exoteric and Esoteric Communication

The style of Seneca's letters is often described as "preacher's style."⁴⁸ This is partly misleading. His voice is rather intended to be that of a personal adviser. One ought to distinguish between the style of a public homily (which requires rhetorical adornment) and private philosophical advice (which does not). Given the primary importance of personal advice in the *Letters to Lucilius*, there are many references to the (alleged) simplicity of the epistolary style, which is called "spontaneous and easy" (*sermo [...] inlaboratus et facilis: epist. 75.1*). Of course, in a private letter, elaborate over-correctness would be terribly out of place (*epist. 75.1*): "You have been complaining that my letters to you are rather carelessly written (*minus [...] accuratas*). Now who talks carefully unless he also desires to talk affectedly (*putide*)?" The epistolary form is appropriate to private philosophical advice in everyday life (*epist. 38.1*): "You are right when you urge that we increase our exchange of letters. But the greatest benefit is to be derived from conversation, because it creeps by degrees into the soul (*minutatim inrepat animo*). Lectures prepared beforehand and spouted in the presence of a throng have in them more noise but less intimacy. Philosophy is good advice; and no one can give advice at the top of his lungs." In the same context, Seneca stresses the differences to public sermons (*ibid. 1f.*): "Of course, we must sometimes also make use of these harangues, if I may so call them (*contionibus*), when a doubting member needs to be spurred on; but when the aim is to make a man learn, we must have recourse to the low-toned words (*summissiora verba*) of conversation. They enter more easily and stick in the memory; for we do not need many words, but, rather, effective words. [...] Yes, precepts and seeds have the same quality; they produce much, and they are slight things." Such concentrated teaching fulfills the Stoic ideal of *brevitas* (in fact, *epist. 38* is very short), a quality Diderot praised in Seneca's style.⁴⁹

Verbal Cascades?

Private advice requires a quiet way of speaking, neither too fast nor too slow (*epist. 40.4*): "Besides, speech that deals with the truth (*veritati*) should be

⁴⁸ Coleman 1974: 285: "The movement by association of ideas [...] is not a whimsical drift but a carefully controlled progression, in which a particular group of ideas is approached from a number of different angles and reinforced at each new exposition. The technique is not that of the philosopher, developing a systematic argument [...], but of the preacher, concerned to drive home with all the arts of rhetoric one or two chosen doctrinal propositions."

⁴⁹ Quoted in: Seidensticker and Grünbein 2002: 159.

unadorned (*incomposita*) and plain (*simplex*).” Here Seneca alludes to the Greek proverb “The word of truth is simple” (ἀπλοῦς ὁ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐστὶν λόγος). He goes on to stress the importance of regularity and justly mentions medical treatment as a parallel to philosophical tutoring (40.5): “Remedies do not avail unless they remain in the system [when applied regularly] (*immorantur*) [...]. What physician can heal his patient in a fleeting visit (*in transitu*)?”⁵⁰ Too voluble speech (apart from being un-Roman)⁵¹ is neither fruitful nor enjoyable (40.5 f.): “May I add that such a jargon of confused and ill-chosen words (*verborum sine delectu ruentium strepitus*) cannot afford pleasure, either?” Verbal cascades certainly do not fit philosophy, which (40.7 f.) “should carefully place (*ponere*) her words, not fling them out, and should proceed step by step (*pedetemptim*); [...] ‘What then?’ you say; ‘should not philosophy sometimes take a loftier tone?’ Of course she should; but dignity of character should be preserved, and this is stripped away by such violent and excessive force. Let philosophy possess great forces, but kept well under control; let her stream flow unceasingly (*perennis*), but never become a torrent.” Unlike a salesman, the philosopher should not show off his oratorical power (*epist.* 52.9–14): “What is baser than philosophy courting applause? Does the sick man praise the surgeon while he is operating? In silence and with reverent awe submit to the cure [...]. Let them be roused to the matter, not to the style (*ad rem commoveantur, non ad verba composita*).” The teacher of philosophy should be (52.15) “a priest, not a pedlar (*non institorem, sed antistitem*).” The good adviser, who gives his discourse the silent but steady fluency of a great river, is represented by Seneca’s teacher Fabianus (*epist.* 40.14) with his “restrained style of speech, far removed from boldness” (*oratio pressa, non audax*). Even Lucilius’s style is praised for the same quality (*epist.* 59.4 f.): “You have your words under control. You are not carried away by your language or borne beyond the limits which you have determined upon [in what you say there is] nothing superfluous nor bombastic”; cf. also (*epist.* 46.2): “There was no burst of force (*impetus*), but an even flow (*tenor*), a style that was vigorous and chaste (*compositio virilis et sancta*). Nevertheless, I noticed from time to time your sweetness and here and there that mildness of yours. Your style is lofty (*grandis*) and noble; I want you to keep to this manner and this direction.”

⁵⁰ Cf. *immorari*: *epist.* 2.2; *in transitu*: 2.3.

⁵¹ *Epist.* 40.11: *In Graecis hanc licentiam tuleris; nos etiam cum scribimus, interpungere adsuevimus.*

Hence, there is a marked difference between *disputatio* / *admonitio* (a public homily, meant to attract students, which needs rhetorical elaboration) and *sermo* (personal advice, *consilium*), which uses “humbler speech” (*summissiora verba*: *epist.* 38.1) and is especially effective, since it creeps into our minds in homoeopathic doses: a distinction fundamental for any appraisal of Seneca’s style.

The Importance of a Theoretical Basis

There is a further distinction (developed by Seneca in *epist.* 94 and 95): *praecepta* and *decreta*. *Praecepta* (which refer to behavior in practical life) use paraenetic speech and play a role in propaedeutics (without losing importance later on), whereas *decreta* (theoretical principles) are explained in serious philosophical teaching.⁵²

Deliberate Use of Words: Semantic Metamorphosis

The *decreta* help us to define the true meaning of words (one of Seneca’s central issues). This proves that serious philosophical reflection must be present already at a very early stage of philosophical education and, in addition, that the language and style of Seneca’s philosophical writings cannot be discussed without taking into account their content. The ninety-fifth letter proves that practical rules (*praecepta*) are not enough; the theoretical part of philosophy is indispensable. According to *epist.* 95.65, Posidonius says that not only *praeceptio*, *suasio*, *consolatio*, and *exhortatio* are needed, but also *aetiologia* (*causarum inquisitio*), which implies a rational approach. In Seneca’s view (95.34f.), false opinions can be eradicated only by learning “what is good, what is bad” (*quid malum, quid bonum sit*), and consequently redefining the current meanings of words. Otherwise, *praecepta* are inefficient. “They must know that everything—except virtue—changes its name (*mutare nomen*) and becomes now good and now bad.” It is necessary to inquire into the reasons of wrong behavior: false admiration and vain fear (95.37). One should eradicate wrong opinions and obtain correct ones on “poverty and riches,

⁵² *Epist.* 94.2: “But Aristo the Stoic [...] believes [...] that the greatest benefit is derived from the actual *decreta* (“doctrines”) of philosophy and from the definition of the Supreme Good. When a man has gained a complete understanding of this definition and has thoroughly learned it, he can frame for himself a precept directing what is to be done in a given case.” In the following letter, Seneca defines the nature of such *decreta* (*epist.* 95.12). Tellingly, Seneca ascribes more power to theoretical insight than to admonitions. He who has really understood philosophy by means of rational proofs will lead a different and better life (95.53–64).

glory and shame, homeland and exile" (95.54). Philosophy differs from other *artes* (*epist.* 95.56 f.): "Conduct (*actio*) will not be right unless the will (*voluntas*) to act is right; for this is the source of conduct. Nor, again, can the will be right without a right attitude of mind (*habitus animi rectus*)." A perfect state of mind can only be achieved by discretion and correct judgment. Judgment needs proofs. Therefore, theory is necessary. *Decreta* are the "roots," *praecepta* the "branches." Theory implies a deliberate use of words: therefore, Seneca's use of language and style can only be understood in view of his theory.

Care for Oneself: The Language of Inner Life

The two last-mentioned aspects of Seneca's language reflect a basic problem of human existence: the tension between—and coexistence of—care for oneself (or one's self) and care for others. Seneca discovers an inner link between improving oneself and improving others.⁵³ Typical of Seneca's language are reflexive (and reflective) expressions such as: *se formare, se ad studia revocare, sibi applicare, suum fieri, in se recedere, ad se recurrere, secum morari*, and *ad se properare* (Foucault 1986: 46). The fact that there are Greek, especially Hellenistic, precedents (Inwood 2005a: 339 f.) does not impair Seneca's merit: he has greatly enriched the Latin language, developing the language of "inner life" (what Traina calls "interiorità").⁵⁴ For parallels and differences between his prose and poetry in this regard, see "Points of contact between Seneca's tragedies and philosophical writings," *infra*, pp. 725 ff.

Rhetoric

In his tragedies, Seneca draws on the poetic language of the Augustan poets. Among Seneca's linguistic and stylistic models, Ovid takes a place of honor (in, for example, his monologues [v. Albrecht 2004: 106–113] and messengers' reports [Liebermann 1974]), followed by Virgil and Horace.⁵⁵

⁵³ Cf. *epist.* 52.9: "improving themselves and others (*meliores fiant faciantque meliores*)"; *De ira* 3.39.1: "For we wish not merely to be healed ourselves, but also to heal"; *epist.* 6.4: "I am glad to learn in order that I may teach"; especially explicit is *epist.* 8.1 f.: "My object in shutting myself up [...] is to be able to help a greater number [...]. There are certain wholesome counsels (*compositiones*, "recipes"), [...] these I am putting into writing. For I have found them helpful in ministering to my own sores."

⁵⁴ Traina 1987 (1995): 9–23; documentation 43–77; bibliography 131–157; instructive addenda: 193–204.

⁵⁵ Basic for the vocabulary (and style) of the tragedies: Billerbeck 1988: 8, 88 (with further bibliography): 87% of Seneca's words are attested before him in Ovid, 82% in Virgil, 71% in

This is significant, since Ovid and Seneca have common roots in the oratory of the Augustan age (as reflected for us in the writings of Seneca the Elder).⁵⁶ Parallels between Seneca's and his father's writings (Leo 1878: 147–159, Preisendanz 1908) and the latter's rhetorical and philosophical sources (including Seneca's teachers) prove that even when competing with his models—which include Greek and Latin drama⁵⁷—Seneca does not neglect his contemporaries' taste for a passionate, purposeful, and impulsive mode. The “rhetorical” style of his tragedies is in harmony with his epoch: just as architects and painters of his day revel in atmospheric effects produced by the luster of precious material, authors, too, try to dazzle their audiences with brilliance. A passionate, “dramatic”⁵⁸ syntax and style are typical of both his prose and his drama.⁵⁹ Both genres abound in *sententiae*,⁶⁰ for example, (*epist.* 105.8): “When there is an evil conscience, something may bring safety, but nothing can bring peace”⁶¹ and (*Phaedr.* 164): “Some women have transgressed with safety, but none with peace of mind.”⁶² Tellingly, the “wise” speaker is the nurse. Similarly, the advice given to Atreus by his anonymous attendant (*Thy.* 204–219) reminds the reader of Seneca's *De clementia* in several instances.⁶³ In tragedies, gnomic wisdom is traditionally conveyed by old servants or the chorus. However, no strictly didactic intention of the plays can be deduced from this.

Horace. Of Ovid's works, Seneca prefers the *Metamorphoses*, of Virgil's, the *Aeneid* and (to a lesser degree) the *Georgics*, of Horace's, the *Odes* (which are a model for Seneca's choruses).

⁵⁶ Ovid in the *Hercules furens*: v. Albrecht 2004: 99–112.

⁵⁷ Old Latin influence is difficult to prove given the fragmentary state of our tradition: Billerbeck 1988: 141 (perhaps too pessimistic). Ovid's *Medea* (which must have influenced Seneca) has not come down to us, but the parallels to *Heroides* 12 are telling. Billerbeck does not systematically compare Seneca's tragedies with his prose writings. The points of contact, however, are numerous.

⁵⁸ For an excellent study of Seneca's style (with careful account of scholarship): Traina 1987 (1995).

⁵⁹ Armisen-Marchetti 1989: 349 f.

⁶⁰ For a list, see Canter 1925: 17; Th.B. Macaulay (in a letter of May 30, 1836): “His works are made up of mottoes. There is hardly a sentence which might not be quoted; but to read him straightforward is like dining on nothing but anchovy sauce.”

⁶¹ *Tutum aliqua res in mala conscientia praestat, nulla securum.*

⁶² *Scelus aliqua tutum, nulla securum tulit.*

⁶³ *Thy.* 205 f.: *fama populi*; *Thy.* 207–210: *Quos cogit metus / laudare, eosdem reddit inimicos metus; / at qui favoris gloriam veri petit, / animo magis quam voce laudari volet*; *Thy.* 213: *Rex velit honesta: nemo non eadem volet*; *Thy.* 215–217: *Ubi non est pudor / nec cura iuris sanctitas pietas fides / instabile regnum est*; *Thy.* 219: *nefas nocere vel malo fratri puta*; see the commentaries.

Longer Developments Preceding a Short Ending

Pichon's (1908: 445) idea that Seneca is "putting philosophy into epigrams" can be developed. Actually, some of the brilliant paradoxes found in Seneca's philosophical prose appear at the end of some of Martial's epigrams.⁶⁴ According to a general principle of style (the so-called Law of Behaghel), the second of two stylistic units is expected to be longer. Contrary to this expectation, in an epigram the preparatory part ("expectation") is longer than the striking solution ("revelation"). This disproportion, which (by means of contrast) enhances the impression of brevity, is part of an epigram's charm. In Seneca, the last sentence of the preserved text of the *Epistulae morales* shows that the same stylistic principle operates even within the final *sententia*: *Infelicissimos esse felices*. These three words are replaced with thirteen in Gummere's translation: "Those whom the world calls fortunate are really the most unfortunate of all." Such striving for explicitness perfectly renders the meaning, but gives no idea of Seneca's epigrammatic style (in the translation, Seneca's word order is inverted, and the second part of the sentence is, in accordance with our habits, made longer than the first). However, even Seneca's word order is telling. *Infelicissimos* raises the reader's expectations. Who are the most unfortunate? And the "answer" is shorter than the "question": The fortunate. This *sententia* is an epigram in a nutshell. Not only does a long letter end with a short sentence, but the intrinsic structure of this sentence repeats the structure of the text.

There is a rich literary and philosophical background to these stylistic procedures. Cato the Elder achieved effects of *brevitas* by unexpectedly placing a shorter element after a longer one, and Caesar stressed the fulminant quickness of his actions in the same way.⁶⁵ The enigmatic definition of "who is most unfortunate" is reminiscent of the type of Pythagorean questions and answers such as: "What is the best / wisest / most beautiful / most blissful thing of all?"⁶⁶ And there is, of course, the Stoic tradition of teaching through paradoxes.

A similar device is the *aprosdoketon* (cf. Petrone 1971), such as (*epist.* 83.24): "When you are the last survivor of the revels; when you have vanquished every one by your magnificent show of prowess [scil. in drinking] and there

⁶⁴ On Seneca and Martial, see Friedrich 1910, Traina 1987 (1995): 112 with add., cf. *epist.* 2.2: "Who is everywhere, is nowhere" (*nusquam est, qui ubique est*) ~ Mart. 7.73.6: *quisquis ubique habitat, Maxime, nusquam habitat*; *epist.* 70.8: "It is folly to die through fear of dying" (*stultitia est timore mortis mori*) ~ Mart. 2.80.2: *hic, rogo, non furor est, ne moriari, mori*.

⁶⁵ v. Albrecht 1971 [1995]: 37 (Cato); 85 f. (Caesar).

⁶⁶ Iamblichus, *Vita Pyth.* 82.

is no man of so great capacity as you—you are vanquished by the cask.”⁶⁷ Or (cf. *epist.* 124.22): “Why dress your hair with such unending attention? [...] Yet you will see a mane of greater thickness tossing upon any horse you choose, and a mane of greater beauty bristling upon the neck of any lion. And even after training yourself for speed, you will be no match for the hare.”⁶⁸ (Here Gummere’s Loeb translation perfectly renders the surprising brevity of the final stroke).

Style and Self-Persuasion.

Rhetorical Structures:

Climax and Use of Synonyms; Tricolon

Seneca intensifies an idea by splitting it up (μερισμός), by specifying and unfolding it under various aspects. In this method, the use of synonyms or near synonyms is paramount. The first letter analyses our loss of time (1.1):⁶⁹ “Certain moments are torn from us, some are gently removed, and others glide beyond our reach” (*eripiuntur [...] subducuntur [...] effluunt*), which is a paraphrase of the tripartite series:⁷⁰ *auferebatur—subripiebatur—excidebat*. The synonyms are arranged in the form of a climax (*gradatio*); the most shameful loss is the last one, which is caused by negligence. Here, a misunderstanding must be clarified. Seneca’s abundance in synonyms is not a mere stylistic fancy—not even a “baroque” protestation against Caesar’s elimination of synonyms—but an integral part of his philosophical teaching method. The next series—a gradation as well—finds a reason for our loss of time in misplaced activity or inactivity (*ibid.*): “The largest portion of our life passes while we are doing ill, a goodly share while we are doing nothing and the whole while we are doing that which is not to the purpose” (*male agentibus [...] nihil agentibus [...] aliud agentibus*). Again, the sentence consists of three members (*cola*). A further gradation shows how to become aware of that permanent loss: “What man can you show me who places any value on his time?” (*quem mihi dabis, qui aliquod pretium tempori ponat*:

⁶⁷ *Cum superstes toti convivio fueris, cum omnes viceris virtute magnifica et nemo vini tam capax fuerit, vinceris—a dolio.*

⁶⁸ *Quid capillum ingenti diligentia comis? [...] In quolibet equo densior iactabitur iuba, horrebit in leonum cervice formosior. Cum te ad velocitatem paraveris, par lepusculo non eris.*

⁶⁹ Viparelli (2000: 64) rightly quotes *angustias temporis mei laxa* (*epist.* 49.10) and distinguishes between the linear course of time and its coming to a standstill in the philosopher’s mind (p. 97); the wise man’s *otium* surpasses the limits of time and space (he is in contact with all the great philosophers).

⁷⁰ On *tricolon* in Seneca, see Beck 2006.

first degree: general statement), “who reckons the worth of each day” (*qui diem aestimet*: second degree: the abstract notion of time is replaced with a concrete one, i.e. *diem*), “who understands that he is dying daily?” (*qui intellegat se cotidie mori?*: third degree: the idea is personalized by self-reflection and intensified by paradoxical expression). It is not by chance that Seneca exhorts Lucilius to “persuade himself” (*persuade hoc tibi*: *epist.* 1.1). The art of persuasion is called rhetoric, which is the application of stylistic means to obtain a definite aim. In his philosophical writings, Seneca shows how rhetoric can be used to persuade not only others, but oneself (for further examples, see “Linguistic differences and connections between Seneca’s philosophical works and his tragedies,” *infra*, pp. 720 ff.).

Excursus: The Development of Seneca’s Style

Analyses of metrics, verse, and sentence structure allow a—tentative—chronological arrangement of the tragedies in three groups. These conclusions are based on the assumption (true for Sophocles and Shakespeare) that an increase in strong sense-pauses within the line reflects greater flexibility and a later date of composition. An early phase is represented by *Agamemnon* (32.4%), *Phaedra* (34.4%), and *Oedipus* (36.8%), whereas *Medea* (47.2%), *Troades* (47.6%), and *Hercules furens* (49.0%) form an intermediate group, and *Thyestes* (54.5%) and *Phoenissae* (57.2%) are the last plays.⁷¹ Other observations seem to support this chronology. The first group has further features in common: *Oedipus* and *Agamemnon* are the only plays containing polymetric choruses. The plays in the first group account for eight of the nine places in which a chorus follows an ode with a transition to the next act (Fitch 1981: 306). In the third group the shortening of final -o⁷² in nouns of the third declension, in some adverbs, and especially in the first-person singular of the present and future tense is employed much more frequently than previously. *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* may, therefore, have been composed considerably later than the other six plays (possibly between AD 60 and 62: Tarrant 1985: 13). All the other tragedies were written before AD 54, the latest possible date for the *Hercules furens* (Tarrant 1985: 12).

⁷¹ Reitz 2006: 54, Tarrant 1985: 11, based on Fitch 1981.

⁷² Hartenberger 1911.

LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES AND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN
SENECA'S PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS AND HIS TRAGEDIES

We have verse as well as prose from Cicero, Columella, and Petronius (and from many Christian authors), but the corpus of Seneca's tragedies is especially extensive (the *Octavia* and the disputed *Hercules Oetaeus* are not considered here).⁷³

Although some features in Seneca's style may be called "baroque" (e.g., "abundant" expression), this aspect should not be overemphasized. Actually, even in his tragedies, "classicizing" features can be detected. As Varius and Ovid had done, Seneca as a playwright prefers classical models viewed through the prism of the normative poetics of the Alexandrian age. Artistic *οἰκονομία* is a governing principle.⁷⁴ This is an important general background even to Seneca's use of language. Seneca's deliberate use of poetic vocabulary has been discussed *supra*.

Between Seneca's philosophical works and his tragedies there are differences of approach to language and style. Whereas the epistles are supposed to be rather "useful" than "delightful" ("Our words should aim not to please, but to help": *epist.* 75.5), in the tragedies there is no such theoretical restriction. But even in the *Epistles*, Seneca makes concessions to rhetoric (*ibid.*; see *supra*, pp. 710 f.). As will be shown, rhetoric is not an otiose adornment, but conditions the structure of the texts and the methods of meditation.

Nor is poetry excluded from the *Epistles*: the philosophical works are interspersed with poetic quotations (which, of course, serve a didactic purpose, as explained by Seneca in *epist.* 108.8–12;⁷⁵ in *epist.* 108.6 the difference between a philosopher's lessons and the theater is stressed;⁷⁶ in *epist.* 80.7 Seneca compares human life to a theatrical play: *vitae humanae mimus*). He quotes lines from tragedies and measures what they say against the performer's real life: He who is acting a king's role is actually a poor slave. The same applies to our lives (*epist.* 80.10). Theatrical plays, therefore,

⁷³ On the language and style of these works, see Billerbeck 1988: 145–173; 174–181.

⁷⁴ Thus, he observes the division of plays into five acts, the use of three actors, and the unity of the place. He even eliminates "superfluous" persons found in his models, such as Aegeus in *Medea*. Moreover, he reduces the musical solo scenes (monodies) cherished by early Latin dramatists (while choruses are found in all plays, *cantica* sung by soloists are absent from *Phoenissae*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Hercules furens*), cf. the epilogue, *infra*, pp. 741–744, "Seneca's ideas on language and style."

⁷⁵ See v. Albrecht 2004: 85, Mazzoli 1970: 108.

⁷⁶ "Certain of them come to hear and not to learn, just as we are attracted to the theater to satisfy the pleasures of the ear, whether by a speech, or by a song, or by a play."

can serve as a mirror helping us to analyze our own situation. This does not mean, however, that the plays pursue a didactic purpose. Although the degree to which Seneca shared a Platonic view of poetry as ἐνθουσιασμός is a matter of dispute,⁷⁷ Seneca the philosopher warns his readers against the power of poetry to raise emotions (*adfectibus nostris facem subdant: epist.* 115.12), by praising bad or irrelevant things, for example. He reports that when the audience at a Euripidean drama protested vehemently against a passage commending wealth and greed, the poet asked them to suspend their judgment until the end of the play. Seneca, therefore, knew perfectly well that readers of dramas should take into account the play's context. This explains the—otherwise surprising—fact that Seneca himself in a tragedy (*Thy.* 207 f.) paraphrased a line that he repeatedly condemned in his philosophical writings: the famous words from Accius's *Atreus: oderint dum metuant* ("Let them hate, if only they fear").⁷⁸ In such cases Seneca subscribes to a standard objection of philosophers to poets:⁷⁹ Poetry fosters and nurtures emotions, which philosophy tries to dominate or even eradicate. So it does not come as a surprise that emotions are developed deliberately by several figures in Senecan drama.

*Seneca Is Fully Aware of the Difference
between Poetry and Philosophy*

The allegorical interpretation of poetry in a philosophical key is explicitly rejected in a passage criticizing philosophers of widely divergent schools who all refer to Homer as a precedent (*epist.* 88.4 f.): "No one of these doctrines is to be fathered upon Homer, just because they are all there; for they are irreconcilable with one another." Instead, "we should learn what made him

⁷⁷ Affirmative: Mazzoli 1970 and Dingel 1974; see, however, Setaioli 1985: 857; 801–811. "For whether we believe with the Greek poet that 'sometimes it is a pleasure also to rave' (Menander, *frag.* 421 Kock; cf. *Hor. carm.* 4.12.28) or with Plato (*Phaidr.* 245 a) that 'the sane mind knocks in vain at the door of poetry' or with Aristotle (*probl.* 30.1) that 'no great genius has ever existed without some touch of madness'—be that as it may, the lofty utterance that rises above the attempts of others is impossible unless the mind is excited" (*dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*].17.10 f.).

⁷⁸ Seneca calls these words *magnas, sed detestabiles* (*clem.* 2.2.2), *dura et abominanda* (*dial.* 3 [= *de ira* 1].20.4), *exsecrabilis* (*clem.* 1.12.4). In the same spirit, Maecenas is criticized, not for the style, but for the content of one of his poems (*epist.* 101.10 f.), and a line from Virgil is used as a "remedy" (*epist.* 101.13).

⁷⁹ Cf. *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*) 16.5: *Inde etiam poetarum furor, fabulis humanos errores alentium [...] quid aliud est vitia nostra incendere, quam auctores illis inscribere deos.* Xenophanes B 11 f. Diels-Kranz; Euripides, *Bellerophon, frag.* 292.7; Plato banished Homer from his Republic (*rep.* 3.398a; cf. *Cic. rep.* 4.5.5).

wise.”⁸⁰ In this sense, a moral interpretation of poetry is often found in Seneca (e.g., *dial.* 12 [= *cons. Pol.*].11.5). Whether such a philosophical reading should be called “allegorical” or not may be left open.⁸¹ However, recourse to allegorical interpretation is evident, as, for example, when Seneca uses Virgil’s description of a male colt to characterize a “great man” (*magno viro*). Here, even Seneca’s terminology (*ex alio in se transferre: epist.* 95.67 and *dum aliud agit: ibid.* 69) alludes to the standard definition of allegory⁸² (Quint. *inst.* 9.2.92, tr. Butler): *aliud dicere, aliud intellegi velle* (“saying one thing, while intending something else to be understood”). However, in the Senecan passage, allegory is not attributed to the poet’s intention, but is limited to the critic’s mind (*ego certe*). In other cases, too, Seneca uses quotations from Virgil quite independently of their literal sense.⁸³ Therefore, in Seneca’s view, a moralizing reading of a poetic text must be methodically separated from the assumption of the author’s moralizing intent, and we are not compelled to read Seneca’s tragedies in a didactic vein.

On the other hand, the tragedies show the influence of *rhetorical invention and disposition*, see, for example, the *controversia* between the nurse and the queen in the first act of *Phaedra*. Later in the drama, the nurse directs a *suasoria* to Hippolytus. The connections between the philosophical works and the tragedies were felt by Seneca’s contemporaries and later authors, such as Lucan, Silius Italicus, and Prudentius. Christian martyrs and their deaths would be shaped into the image of Stoic martyrs, and the passion of St. Hippolytus into the image of his Senecan namesake (Prudentius, *Perist.* 11; Sen. *Phaedr.* 1000–1114); for Seneca’s play, however, there is no need to assume a didactic purpose.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ On *sapere* as the basis of good writing, see *infra*, p. 744 n. 137.

⁸¹ Dingel (1974: 43) and Setaioli (1985: 857) find no allegorical interpretation here; Mazzoli (1970: 13 f.) indirectly affirms it, and, more confidently (223): “per la prima volta nell’antichità, se non erriamo, il criterio allegorico, tradizionale nell’esegesi di Omero, viene esplicitamente esteso alla poesia virgiliana.”

⁸² Mazzoli 1970: 224 f.

⁸³ Mazzoli 1970: 226 f.; *Aen.* 2.726–729; *epist.* 56.12–14; whereas *benef.* 3.37.1 shows full awareness of the literal sense of the same passage.

⁸⁴ According to Fuhrmann (1968), Seneca insists on the contrast between Hippolytus’s “Stoic” attitude and the panic of the others. In my view, Fuhrmann stresses the exclusively didactic aim of this passage too much, whereas Seneca tries to elicit his listeners’ admiration for Hippolytus as a character.

Sententiae

In both groups of works, Seneca shows a preference for condensing his thoughts into brief and pointed statements. Seneca's striving for *brevitas* shows in his breaking up his trimeters into even smaller units (quarters of lines), while Greek tragic poets do not go further than giving half a line to a single speaker. Furthermore, both his philosophical works and his dramas abound in *sententiae*. In Seneca's tragedies, *sententiae* are even more frequent than in his Greek models. While in the philosophical writings the educative purpose is paramount, in the tragedies⁸⁵ *sententiae* frequently serve a dialectic aim in the immediate context of a discussion. They appear even more impressive against the background of a rich variety of themes and ideas, all the more as, in this genre, the author is not constrained to keep himself within the limits of "positive thinking."⁸⁶ The massive presence of *sententiae*, therefore, does not prove a didactic purpose in Seneca's tragedies.

Asyndeton

In Greek tragedies (on heroes such as Oedipus, Thyestes, Alcmeon, Telephus, and Peleus), the stress is laid on the passage from happiness to unhappiness. Roman dramatists from the outset stress the *pathos* of this situation by building asyndetic series of epithets, often alliterated (Accius, *Medea* 415 Ribbeck²): "An exile among enemies, hopeless, destitute, abandoned, wandering."⁸⁷ Seneca follows this pattern in Medea's malediction to Jason (*Med.* 20 f.): "May he live. May he wander through unknown cities in want, in exile, in fear, hated and homeless" (tr. F; *vivat*;⁸⁸ *per urbes erret ignotas egens / exul pavens invisus incerti laris*). Dido's curse against Aeneas was certainly known to Seneca (Verg. *Aen.* 4.615–620: "May he be harried in war by adventurous tribes, and exiled from his own land; may Ascanius be torn from his arms" [tr. C. Day Lewis]).⁸⁹ Interestingly, Virgil is not satisfied with a mere series

⁸⁵ Seidensticker 1969: 85–199 studies, among other aspects of *sententia*, condensation, ambivalence, allusion, and the transition from mimesis to interpretation.

⁸⁶ Armisen-Marchetti 1989: 349 f.

⁸⁷ *Exul inter hostis, expes, expers desertus vagus*; cf. also Accius, *Eurysaces* 333 f.: "Now wandering over the earth, an exile, driven from my kingdom" (*Nunc per terras vagus, extorris, / regno exturbatus*); paratragic: Lucilius 82 f. Marx: *Non dico: vincat licet, et vagus exulet, erret, / exlex*.

⁸⁸ Life appears sometimes as a punishment crueler than death: cf. also Sen. *Herc. f.*; this view is in accord with contemporary life experience: Suet. *Tib.* 61.15 *mori volentibus vis adhibita vivendi*.

⁸⁹ The same is true for passages from the *Aeneid* which dwell on sufferings on land and sea (*Phoen.* 504 f.: [*Iocasta*] *Te maria tot diversa, tot casus vagum / egere*).

of epithets (*vexatus* [...], *extorris*, [...] *avolsus*), but fills each of them with detailed information and builds a rounded-off sentence, perhaps in order to avoid mere repetition of a worn-out pattern. In the case of this type of asyndeton, Seneca is much closer to Accius than to Virgil (therefore, one should not exclude too apodictically the influence of old Latin on Seneca).⁹⁰

The “unfolding” of an idea into its partial aspects (μερισμός) is a rhetorical device known to us from the philosophical writings. It is found in the tragedies as well. Antithesis, “polarity” of expression, catalogue, asyndeton, and aprosdoketon have been described by Billerbeck (1988). The same is true for gradation (in monologues), rhetorical questions, *correctio* with verbal *polyptoton*, and comparatives (omitting the second member of the comparison). Whereas antithesis, gradation, and abundance (from verbal variation to explicit elaboration, especially in passages competing with epic style)⁹¹ determine the structure of paragraphs, there is a pronounced striving for brevity within the single sentence: at the end of sentences or after a significant word, an appended participle can appear (“While I plant my last kisses on my children as their mother—perhaps a dying mother” [tr. F; *dum extrema natis mater infigo oscula, fortasse moriens*: *Med.* 290]; “His face is that of Jove,—but when hurling thunder” [tr. F; *vultus est illi Iovis, / sed fulminantis*: *Herc. f.* 724 f.]); a name (“There is an even greater threat than these:—Medea” [tr. F; *est et his maior metus: / Medea*: *Med.* 516 f.]); an infinitive (“The only safety for Oedipus is not to be saved” [tr. F; *unica Oedipodae est salus / non esse salvum*: *Phoen.* 89 f.]); or a brief exclamation may serve as a conclusive comment: (“O impious crime, grim and horrid sight” [tr. M; *scelus nefandum, triste et aspectu horridum!*: *Herc. f.* 1004]).

Philosophical influence in Seneca’s dramas is by no means limited to *sententiae*, even in style.⁹² There are entire developments comparable to philosophical protreptics or constructed as negative companion pieces to the latter ones.

As for *meter*,⁹³ Seneca uses not the senarius, but the iambic trimeter and handles the latter according to strict rules. In his choruses anapaests prevail, but there are other meters as well. Seneca shows a marked preference for shortening final -o: in this regard he is “omnium poetarum negligentissimus”

⁹⁰ For a different view, see Billerbeck 1988: 141 (“sozusagen nichts”).

⁹¹ “Abundant, superfluous” elements, therefore, should not be banished from the text: Billerbeck 1988: 140.

⁹² Billerbeck (1988: 141) underrates the stylistic parallels between Seneca’s tragedies and his philosophical prose.

⁹³ Marx 1932, Giomini 1959, Bishop 1968, Catone 1971, Fitch 1987a.

(Hartenberger 1911: 65)—this is a “modernist” feature. (For more details, see *supra*, p. 719). Some stylistic differences result from the meter used: *Magis ac magis* is used by Seneca only in his prose works—its last three syllables can be considered a cretic—whereas *magis magisque* is iambic and therefore appears both in drama (*Thy.* 992) and prose (*nat.* 3.27.7).

If Seneca, in messengers' reports, shows a *preference for the use of nouns* (Liebermann 1974: 27), while Euripides prefers verbs, this might be owing to his striving for a “monumental” style (Hiltbrunner 1985: 999). On philosophical terms, see *supra*, p. 706.

Second-Person Prohibitions

These are frequent in Seneca's prose and verse. In his prose, Seneca uses the standard constructions (*noli/te* with the infinitive and *ne* with the perfect subjunctive, but *non est, quod* with the subjunctive is much more common).⁹⁴ The first two are absent from Seneca's tragedies, the third is found in *Thy.* 414–416, where “any prosaic tone is not inappropriate.”⁹⁵ In the tragedies the common form of prohibition is *ne* with imperative (originally it is “inhibitive”: “stop doing this”); where it appears in prose, it might retain this old meaning (e.g., *ne timete; ne metue*). In Seneca's prose it is attested only once (*dial.* 2 [= *const.*]19.4): *Ne repugnat vestro bono et hanc spem [...] alite, [...] meliora excipite [...] ac iuvate*. Here, the use of the elevated form is justified by concinnity (cf. the following imperatives), but also by rhetoric: the final paragraphs favor an impassioned appeal to the reader and the use of elevated language. In addition, the inhibitive meaning is quite appropriate here: “stop resisting [...]”

POINTS OF CONTACT BETWEEN SENECA'S PROSE AND POETRY⁹⁶

Re-defining Terms (“Exile”)

The influence of philosophical prose and of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy is felt in Seneca's tragedies, where we find a positive assessment of exile (as an occasion for a contemplative life): in *Thyestes*⁹⁷ (cf. 533 f. “Let it be mine

⁹⁴ Kühner and Stegmann 1955: II 278 f., Rauschnig 1876: 9 f.

⁹⁵ Hine 2005: 225, who, however, shows that *non est, quod* is attested also in poetry.

⁹⁶ Pierini 1999: 23–37 (“L'esilio nelle tragedie di Seneca. Autobiografia, meditazione filosofica, modelli letterari”).

⁹⁷ One should call Thyestes not a Stoic sage but rather a προκόπτων; but the philosophical

to hide amidst the throng" [tr. M; *Liceat in media mihi / latere turba*]) and also in *Oedipus*. Seneca gives the theme of exile a new, Stoic turn, especially in *Thyestes* and *Oedipus*. Whereas the Euripidean Polynices (*Phoen.* 391) considered the loss of freedom of speech the greatest evil of exile, for our Roman tragedian *regnum* is the supreme evil. In a chorus, the very term of "king" is redefined philosophically, with characteristic repetitions of the key words *rex* and *regnum* (*Thy.* 344–390): "Riches do not make a king, [...] a king is he who has laid fear aside and the base longings of an evil heart; [...] 'tis the upright mind that holds true sovereignty. [...] Such kingdom on himself each man bestows" (tr. M; *Regem non faciunt opes, [...] / rex est qui posuit metus / et diri mala pectoris; [...] mens regnum bona possidet. [...] hoc regnum sibi quisque dat.*). The end of the chorus has an Epicurean ring (*Phoen.* 393–395): *me dulcis saturet quies; / obscuro positus loco / leni perfruar otio*. The chorus prepares for and explains Thyestes's forebodings (412–420; 423–428; 446–454; 483f.) when returning from exile with his son Tantalus (who naively believes in the magnificence of *regnum* and in the honesty of his uncle Atreus). Thus, there is an inversion of traditional values—strongly influenced by philosophy. In a Stoic vein, Thyestes is not afraid of speaking in paradoxes (454): "Evil fortune is to be preferred to good" (tr. M; *malam bonae praeferre fortunam licet*).⁹⁸ The reader immediately recalls the last line of the *Epistulae morales* (124.24): "Those whom the world calls fortunate are really the most unfortunate of all" (*infelicissimos esse felices*).

Stylistic Devices

In some respects, the style of the dramas is livelier and more emotional than that of the philosophical works. Apostrophes are more frequent in the tragedies (*anime*, see *infra*, pp. 734–739). Rhetorical questions with *egone ut* are found exclusively in his dramatic works (*Herc. f.* 372; *Med.* 398, 893, 929; *Oed.* 671). The interjection *o* appears both in Seneca's prose and in his poetry. In the philosophical writings, ready-made phrases (often in the accusative) are preferred (*o te [virum / hominem] felicem [...] o tristes ineptias! [...] o quam [...] o quando [...] o quanta [...] o ne* ["indeed"]). In the tragedies *o* with vocative (or nominative) takes the place of honor (partly favored by the example of Greek tragedy). This construction is rare in Seneca's prose;

elements in this play are evident. Pöschl 1977 (= 1979) considered the *satelles* a representative of Seneca.

⁹⁸ Paradox is an appropriate way of describing a world in which right and wrong, good and bad have changed places (Lefèvre 1970: 60).

it appears in some poetic quotations (*epist.* 107.11 in a versified prayer after Cleanthes; *epist.* 73.10; cf. *epist.* 76.33; from Virgil) and in especially solemn apostrophes (*epist.* 55.3): "O Vatia, you are the only one who knows how to live" (*O Vatia, solus scis vivere!*); cf. *benef.* 2.13.1: "O Pride, the bane of great fortune and its highest folly" (*O superbia, magnae fortunae stultissimum malum!*); *nat.* 1.17.9: "Happy the poverty [...]" (*O felix paupertas* [nom.]); *apocol.* 12.3.31: "O advocates" (*o causidici* [mock heroic]). *O* with vocative (or nominative) is avoided by Seneca in his prose more strictly than by Cicero, even in his orations.

Likewise, the use of the imperative *age* shows that Seneca tends to reserve the stronger means of expression for the tragedies: *age*, *anime* and *hoc age* are limited to the tragedies, whereas the prose writings exhibit ready-made phrases such as *id age*, *ut*; *age tuum negotium*; *age gratias*.

The Use of Patterns of Thought in Both Genres: Gradatio and Priamel

Behind the *gradatio* of Hercules conquering first the "monsters" that are threatening him externally and then conquering himself there is a philosophical idea. The very principle governing the development of this motif in *Hercules furens* (v. Albrecht 2004: 99–119) is made explicit in *Herc. f.* 1275f.: "Now regain that spirit of yours which is a match for any trouble, now you must act with great valor. Do not let Hercules give way to anger" (tr. F; *nunc tuum nulli imparem / animum malo resume, nunc magna tibi / virtute agendum est: Herculem irasci veta.*). In the play, Juno's idea of having Hercules fight himself ("Now he must war with himself" [tr. F; *bella iam secum gerat: Herc. f.* 85]) is first developed on a negative scale, when the hero kills his own family, and then on a positive scale: Hercules overcomes his wrath and decides to go on living for his father's sake. The continuity is stressed by the hero himself (tr. F; *Herc. f.* 1316f.): *eat ad labores hic quoque Herculeus labor: / vivamus*. "Priamel" (*praeambulum*) is a term denoting a series of examples followed by one's own choice. An example can be found in *Herc. f.* 192–201: "Another may be carried to many countries by Renown; garrulous Rumor may praise him through every city, and raise him equal with the starry heavens; another may ride high in a chariot. For me, let my own land hide me in a safe and secluded home. White-haired old age comes to homebodies, and the ignominious fortunes of a small house have a lowly but firm foundation. Spirited valor falls from great height."⁹⁹ This is how Seneca in a tragic chorus

⁹⁹ *Alium multis gloria terris / Tradat et omnes fama per urbes / Garrula laudet caeloque*

develops a stylistic pattern we know from Tibullus 1.1 and from Horace, *carm.* 1.1. As the last line shows, the theme is deliberately introduced as a contrast to the subject of the tragedy: the fall of the greatest hero.

A similar type of argument is found in *epist.* 68.10 f.: "Then you say: 'Is it retirement, Seneca, that you are recommending to me? You will soon be falling back upon the maxims of Epicurus!' I do recommend retirement to you, but only so that you may use it for greater and more beautiful activities than those which you have resigned; to knock at the haughty doors of the influential, to make alphabetical lists of childless old men, to wield the highest authority in public life—this kind of power exposes you to hatred, is short-lived, and, if you rate it at its true value, is tawdry. One man shall be far ahead of me as regards his influence in public life, another in salary as an army officer and in the position which results from this, another in the throng of his clients; but it is worthwhile to be outdone by all these men, provided that I myself can outdo Fortune."¹⁰⁰

Both passages find their climax in a *sententia*. In the dramatic chorus, the *sententia* looks like a proverb; its character is contemplative (although it prepares the listener for the catastrophe to come, it is not meant to incite anyone to immediate action). While in the chorus the personal pronoun *me* stands in the center of the text to underline the chorus's distance from political life, in the letter, the personal pronoun *a me* reinforces the final *sententia*. The *ego* takes a polemical stance toward other lifestyles. In the drama, the course of events cannot be stopped, and the chorus does not try to do so; it only adopts a resignation to life in general. In the letter, Seneca insists on the scarcity of time and on the importance of making a decision. While the chorus accept its own "poor" condition (*sordida*), in the letter the lifestyle of the others polemically gets the same epithet. Clearly, in the letter, the first step toward a metamorphosis of oneself through language is achieved by realizing the *philosophical change of the significance of words*.

On the other hand, in the letter, Seneca's language is more rational; in the dramatic chorus there is vivid description. In the letter, Seneca overtly

parem / Tollat et astris, // Alius curru sublimis eat: / Me mea tellus lare secreto / Tutoque tegat. // Venit ad pigros cana senectus, / Humilique loco sed certa sedet / Sordida parvae fortuna domus: / Alte virtus animosa cadit.

¹⁰⁰ 'Otium' inquis 'Seneca, commendas mihi? ad Epicureas voces delaberis?' Otium tibi commendo, in quo maiora agas et pulchriora quam quae reliquisti: pulsare superbas potentiorum fores, digerere in litteram senes orbos, plurimum in foro posse invidiosa potentia ac brevis est et, si verum aestimes, sordida. Ille me gratia forensi longe antecedit, ille stipendiis militaribus et quaesita per hoc dignitate, ille clientium turba. [cui in turba] Par esse non possum, plus habent gratiae: est tanti ab omnibus vinci, dum a me fortuna vincatur.

discusses the differences of various philosophical schools (cf. "falling back upon the maxims of Epicurus"). In the letter, as would be expected in prose, the grammatical subjects are mostly persons. Not before the last sentence is *fortuna* quasi personified, but even then only in the passive voice. In the drama *fortuna* (though poor) stands with the speaker; in the letter it is an enemy to be conquered. In the tragic chorus there is much more personification: abstract nouns are most frequently used as grammatical subjects and act as allegorical figures: *gloria, fama, senectus, fortuna, virtus*. Liveliness is obtained here through *evidentia*, whereas the text of the letter is enlivened by means of dialogue, discussion, even polemic.

THE USE OF LINGUISTIC AND STYLISTIC MEANS FOR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SELF-INSTRUCTION

Positive ("Philosophical") Self-Instruction

The positive aim to be achieved is independent thought and an individual's construction of an inner world of his own.

Words are the most important medium for Seneca's self-instruction.

A first step is to change the meaning of words by philosophical reflection. These redefinitions—which in the view of Stoicism reestablish the true and original meaning¹⁰¹ of a word—are often rather far from *consuetudo* (ordinary linguistic usage) and therefore may be shaped stylistically as paradoxes.¹⁰² This is true, for example, for the notions of "slave" and "free" (*epist.* 47.17): "He is a slave.' His soul, however, may be that of a freeman. 'He is a slave.' But shall that stand in his way? Show me a man, who is not a slave; one is a slave to lust, another to greed, another to ambition, and all men slaves to hope and fear. I will name you an ex-consul who is slave to an old hag, a millionaire

¹⁰¹ Setaioli 1988: 29.

¹⁰² Cf. Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 1.4: *Quae quia sunt admirabilia contraque opinionem omnium—ab ipsis etiam παράδοξα appellantur temptare volui possentne proferri in lucem et ita dici, ut probarentur [...]*—eoque hos locos scripsi libentius, quod mihi ista παράδοξα quae appellant maxime videntur esse Socratica longeque verissima. Seneca uses the term twice. One instance is *epist.* 87.1.2: *ne et hoc putes inter Stoica paradoxa ponendum, quorum nullum esse falsum nec tam mirabile quam prima facie videtur, cum volueris, adprobabo, immo etiam si nolueris* (this whole letter is on Stoic paradoxes concerning the true meaning of "good," "richness," "poverty"). The other instance of *paradoxum* is *benef.* 2.31.1.1: *Hoc ex paradoxis Stoicae sectae minime mirabile, ut mea fert opinio, aut incredibile est: eum, qui libenter accipit, beneficium reddidisse*. What counts is *voluntas*; if you expect recompense for a good deed, this is no longer a *beneficium*, but an affair (*negotatio*).

who is slave to a serving-maid [...]. No servitude is more disgraceful than that which is self-imposed.”¹⁰³ The same applies to “happiness” and “unhappiness.” The point of the very last letter of the collection is this (*epist.* 124.24): “the fortunate are most unfortunate” (*infelicissimos esse felices*). The same, of course, is true of “richness” (“riches are no good” [*divitiae bonum non sunt*: *epist.* 87.28]; “in whose minds bustling poverty has wrongly stolen the title of riches” [*apud quos falso divitiarum nomen invasit occupata paupertas*: *epist.* 119.12]) and “poverty” (v. Albrecht 2004: 33–52); “friendship” (*ibid.* 55; Lana 2001a); “greatness,” which should be inseparable from “being good” (*aut et bonum erit aut nec magnum*: *clem.* 1.20.6 criticizing Livy, *frg.* 66 Weissenborn-Müller);¹⁰⁴ also of “good”¹⁰⁵ and “evil”:¹⁰⁶ the only good is virtue (*unum ergo bonum ipsa virtus est*: *epist.* 76.21), and the term *malum* is wrongly applied to pain, imprisonment, exile, and death. Actually, these are only seeming evils (*habent mali speciem*: *epist.* 82.15), not real evils (*epist.* 85.25; 85.30 and 41; cf. *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).3.14: “These things of which I have deemed Cato worthy are not real ills;” they are indifferent, neither good nor bad (*epist.* 82.10). It is up to the philosopher to distinguish true evils from seeming ones (*epist.* 90.28; 110.8). The *change of the meaning of words* causes a change in the philosopher’s perception of the world and of his life, to the point of reshaping his opinions and his mind.

From the single word, Seneca proceeds to the application of various stylistic means based on rhetorical forms of self-admonition and self-education. There are “logical” and “emotional” means of persuasion.

“Logical” Means of Persuasion

The first group encompasses deductive and inductive conclusions. The deductive form can be represented by a syllogism, which in its complete form is conclusive: All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore he is mortal. If we omit the second part (“Socrates is a man”), we get an abbreviated form, which is stylistically more elegant, but not compelling logically: the so-called enthymema, a rhetorical substitute for the syllogism.

¹⁰³ The passage is unified by words of the same root: *servus* [...] *servus* [...] *servit* [...] *servientem* [...] *servitus*.

¹⁰⁴ Seneca, however, does not always follow his own rule: *voces magnae, sed detestabiles* (*clem.* 2.2.2); *magna in illo ingenii vis est, sed iam tendentis in pravum* (*epist.* 29.4); *magnum* [...] *ingenium* of Antony (*epist.* 83.2), of Maecenas (*epist.* 114.4; cf. 92.35 *grande*).

¹⁰⁵ For example, *epist.* 34.3; 42.1; 74.16 f.; 98.9; *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Helv.*).5.6; 9.2.

¹⁰⁶ E.g., *epist.* 82.2; *dial.* 1 (= *prov.*).6.1; *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Helv.*).5.6.

The complementary method is induction: Romulus is mortal, Tullus is mortal, Servius is mortal, Tarquinius is mortal, and so on. All these are men. Therefore, all men are mortal. Since complete induction is never fully achieved anyway, the orator shortens this tiresome procedure by limiting himself to mentioning one example. Needless to say, the examples may impress the audience, but they prove nothing. However, more often than one would expect, Seneca uses complete syllogism (e.g., *epist.* 82.9 f.) and even raises pertinent objections against a syllogism of Zeno himself ("No evil is glorious; but death is glorious; therefore death is no evil"): as Seneca rightly objects, death is not glorious as such, but only if one dies courageously. When working on his *Moralis philosophiae libri* (cf. *epist.* 106.2; 108.1; 109.17; Lactantius, *inst.* 1.16.10; 6.17.28), Seneca used his later letters increasingly as "preliminary exercise(s)" and "preliminary studies in dialectics" (Leeman 1953).

On the other hand, "what the world wants is strength of utterance, not precision of utterance."¹⁰⁷ Seneca feels that mere syllogisms are not liable to persuade living persons in a given situation (*epist.* 82.19): "But I for my part decline to reduce such questions to a matter of dialectical rules or to the subtleties of an utterly soulless system. Away, I say, with all that sort of thing, which makes a man feel, when a question is propounded to him, that he is hemmed in, and forces him to admit a premise and then makes him say one thing in his answer when his real opinion is another. When truth is at stake, we must act more frankly; and when fear is to be combated, we must act more bravely." He wants to persuade and convince people, not just compel them to confess something against their will: To conquer the fear of death, forget syllogisms; you had better remember *exempla* (such as the 300 Fabii) or brief maxims, like the words of Leonidas before the battle at Thermopylae.

Emotional Means of Persuasion

This brings us to the emotional means of persuasion: *ethos* and *pathos*.

Ethos is largely extra-linguistic, based as it is on the relationship between teacher and pupil, on the mutual belief that both sides are doing their best. The teacher must believe that the student is willing to learn, and the student must believe that the teacher will do his best to instruct him. Otherwise, a learning process is not possible. This is an important lesson from *epist.* 108: v. Albrecht (2004: 88 f.); cf. also *epist.* 118.1: "However, I shall not be disagreeable; I

¹⁰⁷ Jack London, quoted by Traina 1987 (1995): 25.

know that it is safe to trust you" (*sed non ero difficilis: bene credi tibi scio*). Here, the teacher's example and his behavior in real life are even more important than what he says. These are certainly the best means to enhance the student's respect for the teacher and for philosophy. However, *ethos* can and must find linguistic expression as well: To create a good atmosphere for learning, Seneca does not shrink from using religious speech¹⁰⁸ and conjuring up the poetic vision of a sacred grove (*epist.* 41.25), thus evoking a touch of *horror sacer*, though not to the point of frightening the student. Other linguistic means of *ethos* appear in Seneca's friendly and patient ways of correcting the student's errors without impairing his human dignity. Occasionally, Seneca goes even further: in order not to intimidate Lucilius, he even avows his own imperfection, e.g. (*epist.* 7.1): "I shall admit my own weakness, at any rate; for I never bring back home the same character that I took abroad with me."¹⁰⁹ And there is more (*dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*].17.3): "I am not a wise man, nor—to feed your malevolence—shall I ever be."

Even *pathos*—the linguistic and stylistic means liable to excite strong emotions—can be used in instruction, as Seneca shows. The teacher of philosophy is called in this context *advocatus* (*epist.* 108.12). And a sermon by the philosopher Attalus is described in terms of rhetoric as a "peroration" against vices (*Attalum [...] in vitia [...] perorantem: epist.* 108.13). In the following example (as referred by Seneca from Sotion), rhetorical devices such as anaphora and rhetorical questions abound (*epist.* 108.20): *non credis [...] non credis [...] non credis [...]*? And the play on the same root continues: *crediderunt [...] credulitatis*.

While such explicit forms of rhetoric are especially appropriate at an early ("exoteric") stage, when it is the teacher's task to attract pupils to the study of philosophy, later on, in everyday personal advice and guidance ("esoteric" teaching), simple and straightforward speech is required. But even here, artistic elements are not excluded: especially brief, "condensed" statements¹¹⁰ that can be learned and remembered easily: such *sententiae* are explicitly recommended, even in poetic form, as early as Cleanthes (translated by Seneca, *epist.* 108.10): "As our breath produces a louder sound when it passes through the long and narrow opening of the trumpet and escapes by a hole which widens at the end, even so the fettering rules of poetry

¹⁰⁸ *Ex superiore loco homines videntem, ex aequo deos; vis [...] divina; caelestis potentia; numinis; sacer.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ego certe confiteor imbecillitatem meam: numquam mores, quos extuli, refero.*

¹¹⁰ Examples are the quotations from Epicurus and others, as used in the first group of letters (1–29).

clarify our meaning."¹¹¹ Seneca (who quotes poets frequently)¹¹² observes that the strictness of poetic form adds to the efficiency of the message (*epist.* 108.10): "When meter is added and when regular prosody has compressed a noble idea, then the selfsame thought comes, as it were, hurling with a fuller fling."¹¹³ In this context he uses strong metaphors—"Our minds are struck" (*feriuntur animi: epist.* 108.11), "strike home, charge them with this duty" (*hoc preme, hoc onera: epist.* 108.12)—to the point of belittling the importance of "double-meanings, syllogisms, hair-splitting and other side-shows of ineffective smartness."

Nor are other elements of rhetoric absent from this most private sphere of education, the dialogue between teacher and student and the student's dialogue with himself. An example is the first letter (v. Albrecht 2004: 9–23). On a larger scale, there is *gradatio*.¹¹⁴

Negative Self-Instruction (Medea)

Medea as a self-educator, a shaper of herself (or, if the reader prefers, of her self)—applies a method quite similar to that adopted by the student of philosophy.

Words are, again, a crucial means of self-instruction.

Verbal devices used here include a redefinition of terms. In view of what she is planning now, Medea calls her previous crimes *pietas* (*quidquid admissum est adhuc / pietas vocetur: Med.* 904f.). By the same token, her (hitherto still moderate) hatred of Jason must be called "love" (*amas adhuc: Med.* 897). This inversion of the original meaning of the word parallels what the philosopher is saying, e.g., about poverty and richness. A slightly more lenient way of changing one's attitude is to exchange epithets. This way of manipulating one's own opinion is found both in the prose writings and the tragedies, although it is used to achieve contrary aims: Medea's former misdeeds (which include the murder of her brother) are "light" (*levia*) and

¹¹¹ *Quemadmodum spiritus noster clariorem sonum reddit, cum illum tuba per longi canalis angustias tractum patentiore novissime exitu effudit, sic sensus nostros clariores carminis arta necessitas efficit.*

¹¹² Virgil, especially, is used to illustrate essential points (e.g., *epist.* 76.33 on the *praemeditatio futurorum malorum*; *epist.* 78.15 on remembering positive experiences; *epist.* 108.24–29 on the importance of time; *epist.* 12.3 on a dignified death (*vixi*); and *epist.* 48.11 and 73.5 on the true way to the stars). Another source of *sententiae* is, of course, Publilius Syrus (e.g., *epist.* 108.9).

¹¹³ *Ubi accessere numeri et egregium sensum adstrinxere certi pedes, eadem illa sententia velut lacerto excussiore torquetur.*

¹¹⁴ For a comparative study of tragedy and prose, see, e.g., v. Albrecht 2004: 112–119.

“common” (*vulgaris notae*: *Med.* 906), “girlish” (*puellaris furor*: *Med.* 909), “preludes,” mere finger-exercises (cf. *prolusit* and *manus [...] rudes*: *Med.* 907 f.). This mirrors the way the philosopher belittles pain (*epist.* 78.13: “Pain is slight if opinion has added nothing to it. [...] ‘It is nothing, a trifling matter at most; keep a stout heart and it will soon cease’; then in thinking it slight, you will make it slight. Everything depends on opinion [...]: It is according to opinion that we suffer.”¹¹⁵ Of course, in the tragedies, terms such as “greatness” are used in a non-philosophical sense (contrary to *dial.* 3 [= *de ira* 1].20.6). Atreus or Medea strive to achieve something extraordinarily “great,” even “greater”—typical is the comparative: “Greater crimes become me now, after giving birth” (tr. F; *maiora iam me scelera post partus decent*: *Med.* 50); “Some greater (*maius*) thing, larger (*amplius*) than the common and beyond the bounds (*supra fines*) of human use is swelling in my soul, and it urges on my sluggish hands—I know not what it is, but ‘tis some mighty thing (*grande quiddam*)” (tr. M; *Thy.* 267–270).

“Redeeming the Time”

Since in philosophical admonition the idea that there is no time to be lost is crucial, Seneca uses similar phrases in both genres: “Now break off sluggish delays” (tr. F; *rumpe iam segnes moras*: *Med.* 54). Adjectives denoting idleness appear in tragic self-addresses and in the philosophical writings, e.g. *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).9.3: “Why [...] do you stretch before yourself months and years in long array, unconcerned (*securus*) and slow (*lentus*) though time flees so fast?” Medea addresses her *animus*: “Why are you slackening, my spirit?” (*quid anime cessas?*: *Med.* 895; cf. *titubas*: 937). Iocasta addresses herself before her suicide (*Oed.* 1024): “Why are you benumbed, my soul?” (*quid, anime, torpes?*). Cf. *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).9.2: *quid cunctaris, inquit, quid cessas?* and *epist.* 31.7: “It is not enough if you do shrink from work; ask for it [...] the very quality that endures toil and rouses itself to hard and uphill effort, is of the spirit, which says: ‘Why do you grow slack? It is not the part of a man to fear sweat’” (*laborem si non recuses, parum est: posce [...] animi est ipsa tolerantia, quae se ad dura et aspera hortatur ac dicit: quid cessas? non est viri timere sudorem*). The fierce address to a strong enemy or to a hesitating friend is part of epic speech (Turnus to Drances: *Verg. Aen.* 11.389; the Sibyl to Aeneas: *Aen.* 6.51 f.: “What? Slow to pay your vows and say your prayers?” [tr.

¹¹⁵ *Levis est dolor, si nihil ei opinio adiecerit. [...] ‘nihil est aut certe exiguum est, duremus; iam desinet’: levem illum, dum putas, facies. Omnia ex opinione suspensa sunt [...]. tam miser est quisque quam credit.*

C. Day Lewis; *cessas in vota precesque*): this rare Virgilian construction is the model for Sen. *Med.* 406: "My rage will never slacken in seeking revenge" [tr. F; *numquam meus cessabit in poenas furor*]). Thus, Hecuba provokes Pyrrhus to go on slaughtering old people and kill her (*Tro.* 1000): "Pyrrhus, why hesitate?" (tr. F; *Pyrrhe, quid cessas?*). Likewise the philosopher provokes Fortune: cf. *epist.* 64.4: "Why keep me waiting, Fortune? Enter the lists! Behold, I am ready for you!" (*quid cessas, fortuna? congregere: paratum vides*): an example of Seneca's "dramatic" style in his prose.

Fierce admonition to commit a crime may also be part of a moralizing sermon; see the speech of the *nutrix* to Phaedra (*Phaedr.* 173 f.): "Go on, overturn nature with your wicked fires! Why do monsters (or: monstrous actions) cease?" (tr. F/M, modified; *Perge et nefandis verte naturam ignibus; / cur monstra cessant?*). Cf. *Tro.* 1002: "Unite the parents-in-law [of Achilles]. Proceed, you butcher of the aged" (tr. F; *coniunge soceros. perge, mactator senum*). This pattern often contains the imperative *i!*, as in Juno's sardonic address to Hercules ("Go ahead, proud man, aspire to the gods' abodes" [tr. F; *i nunc, superbe, caelitim sedes pete: Herc. f.* 89]) and Medea's to Jason ("Go on now, arrogant man, seek out virgins' bedrooms" [*i nunc, superbe, uirginum thalamos pete: Med.* 1007]). Oedipus's self-addresses with *i!* express utmost despair ("Go, get you to the palace with hurrying feet; congratulate your mother" [tr. M, modified; *i, perge, propero regiam gressu pete: / gratare matri: Oed.* 880 f.]; "Go, speed you, fly!—but stop, lest you stumble and fall on your mother" [tr. M, modified; *i profuge vade—siste, ne in matrem incidas: Oed.* 1051]).

In his prose, Seneca is equally ironical¹¹⁶ about the scholar Didymus, who wrote 4,000 books on irrelevant matters ("Come now, do not tell me that life is long!" [*i nunc et longam esse vitam nega!: epist.* 88.37]); about a certain Hostius, who used mirrors during his sexual orgies ("Go on now and say that the mirror was invented to touch up one's looks!" [*i nunc et dic speculum munditiarum causa repertum: nat.* 1.16.3]); about people who wish their benefactors mischief in order to obtain an occasion to show them their gratitude ("But go now and suppose that this is gratitude" [*i nunc et hoc esse grati puta: benef.* 6.35.5]); and about a snob who, after having been placed on a chair by his slaves, asked: "Am I sitting already?" (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*] 12.8): "After this imagine that the mimes fabricate many things to make a mock of luxury!" (*i nunc et mimos multa mentiri ad exprobrandam luxuriam puta*). A

¹¹⁶ A slightly different case is *benef.* 4.38.2, in view of an exemplary punishment: *i, ostende, quam sacra res sit mensa hospitalis*.

friendlier nuance is found in the same expression when—after a long series of proofs—a current prejudice is definitively dismissed. This is true of the fears of death and of poverty in *dial.* 12 (= *cons. Helv.*).6.8: “What folly, then, to think that the human mind [...] is troubled by journeying and changing its home” (*i nunc et humanum animum [...] moleste ferre puta transitum*); cf. *ibid.* 10.10: “What folly then to think that it is the amount of money and not the state of mind that matters” (*i nunc et puta pecuniae modum ad rem pertinere, non animi*). For a similar use of *nega nunc*, see *epist.* 101.14. Interestingly, in most of the prose passages the translator has replaced the lively imperative *il* with less colloquial expressions (“after this,” “what folly”).

The imperative *perge* has a similar function. Medea exhorts herself (566f.): “Press on! Now is the time for daring, and for undertaking all that Medea can do and all that she *cannot* do” (tr. F; *perge, nunc aude, incipe / quidquid potest Medea, quidquid non potest*). Juno kindles her own rage by addressing it (*Herc. f.* 75): “Onward, my anger, onward! Crush this overreacher!” (tr. F; *perge, ira, perge et magna meditantem opprime*).¹¹⁷ Atreus exhorts himself to reveal everything to Thyestes (*Thy.* 892): “On! While heaven is tenantless” (*dies recessit: perge dum caelum uacat*). The same imperative is found in philosophical exhortation (*epist.* 76.5): “Proceed then, Lucilius, and hasten, lest you yourself be compelled to learn in your old age, as is the case with me” (*perge, Lucili, et propera, ne tibi accidat quod mihi, ut senex discas*). Further warnings against procrastination are found in *epist.* 1.3; *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).4.2. The imperative *occupa* (*Hoc, anime, occupa: Thy.* 270) can be compared to *dial.* 10 (= *brev.*).9.2: *Nisi occupas, fugit*.

Self-Address

An effective means of stimulating oneself to action is self-address. Before declaring her incestuous love to Hippolytus, Phaedra speaks to her *animus* (*aude, anime, tempta, perage: Phaedr.* 592; *en, incipe, anime!*; *ibid.* 599). So does Phaedra’s nurse, before falsely accusing Hippolytus (*Phaedr.* 719): *anime, quid segnis stupes?* Similarly, before committing their crimes, Medea and Atreus direct to their *animus* entire series of imperative and hortative verbal forms (*Med.* 895–905); moreover, there appear rhetorical questions (*quid, anime, cessas?* [...] *pars* [...] *quota est?*; *Med.* 895f.; cf. also 908f. and *Thy.* 196–199). In *Medea* and *Thyestes* the self-addresses (*anime: Thy.* 192) come back later at crucial moments, when some hesitations emerge (*male agis,*

¹¹⁷ The situation is different in *Tro.* 630: *bene est: tenetur. perge, festina, attrahe.*

recedis, anime: Thy. 324; *quid, anime, titubas?: Med.* 937). On the other hand, in such situations heroes bid virtues good-bye (*Thy.* 249): *excede, pietas*. Furthermore, when urging himself to commit his deed, Atreus uses an entire chain of adjectives in vocative form (*Thy.* 176–178): *ignave*,¹¹⁸ *iners, enervis et [...] inulte*. Neronian gigantism ravel in generalizing notions like (*Thy.* 180–188): *totus [...] orbis [...] agros et urbis [...] undique [...] tota [...] tellus [...] totus [...] populus [...] quisquis*. On a more general scale, *gradatio* is used (*Thy.* 193–195): *nefas / atrox, cruentum* (and what is much more): *tale quod frater meus / suum esse mallet*.

Exaggeration can border on absurdity: here *frater* is no longer the epitome of love, but of murderous, even suicidal hatred: by redefining words and turning values upside down, Seneca presents us here with an inverted mirroring of edifying philosophical redefinitions. Determined as he is to annihilate his brother Thyestes, Atreus does not even shrink from self-destruction (*Thy.* 190 f.): “This mighty palace itself, illustrious Pelops’s house, may it even fall on me, if only on my brother, too, it fall” (tr. M; *Haec ipsa pollens incliti Pelopis domus / ruat vel in me, dummodo in fratrem ruat*). The same is true of Clytemnestra (*Ag.* 202): “death has no pang when shared with whom you would” (tr. M, modified; *mors misera non est commori cum quo velis*). In this line of thought, *scelus* becomes something desirable (*Thy.* 203). Passion takes possession of the entire person: the leading emotion (*ira*) is made an epithet (*iratus Atreus: Thy.* 118); Atreus is completely imbued with anger. Even reason falls under the sway of rage: a “rational” excuse for yielding to destructive emotions is the idea of a “preventive war” (*Thy.* 201–204): “Therefore, ere he strengthen himself or marshal his powers, we must begin the attack, lest, while we wait, the attack be made on us. Slay or be slain will he; between us lies the crime for him who first shall do it” (tr. M; *proinde antequam se firmit aut vires parat, / petatur ultro, ne quiescentem petat. / Aut perdet aut peribit: in medio est scelus / positum occupanti*). Cf. *Ag.* 193: *scelus occupandum est*. Interestingly, in Seneca’s tragedies an irrational state of mind is often obtained and artfully maintained by means of rational techniques of meditation. Seneca’s tragedies are not “didactic plays”; they offer a sober analysis of the vast potentialities of the human mind.

In both genres, prose and tragedy, Seneca’s use of similar stylistic means is based on analogous rhetorical techniques. However, explicit address to the *animus* is limited to the tragedies—with only one exception (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].2.10): “Essay, my soul, the task long planned; deliver yourself

¹¹⁸ Similarly, Clytemnestra blames herself as *pigra* (*Ag.* 193).

from human affairs" (*aggredere, anime, diu meditatum opus, eripe te rebus humanis*). Actually, there is no exception: Cato is imagined here as the hero of a tragedy. This accounts for the use of tragic speech. On the other hand, reflexive use of *eripere* is also found in the Letters (*epist.* 19.1): "If possible, withdraw yourself from all the business of which you speak; and if you cannot do this, tear yourself away" (*si potes, subduc te istis occupationibus, si minus, eripe*). Cf. *epist.* 80.4: "But what better thing could you wish for than to break away from this slavery, a slavery that oppresses us all?" (*quid autem melius potes velle quam eripere te huic servituti, quae omnes premit*).

To see how self-admonition is shaped individually in each case, let us look at an example in more detail (*Med.* 41): "My spirit, if you are alive, if there is any of your old energy left" (tr. F; *si vivis, anime, si quid antiqui tibi / remanet vigoris*). Medea wants to fill her *animus* with strength (*Med.* 42 f.): "Drive out womanish fears, and plant the forbidding Caucasus in your mind" (tr. F; *pelle femineos metus / et inhospitalem Caucasum mente indue*). These are specific admonitions to a woman from Colchis: she should forget her female nature, but remember the roughness of her homeland. In an important *gradatio* she exhorts herself to surpass the misdeeds of her youth (*Med.* 49 f.): "I did all this as a girl. My bitterness must grow more weighty (*gravior*): greater (*maiora*) crimes become me now, after giving birth" (tr. F). This is a systematic mental exercise in *ira* and *furor*. As for content, we are at the antipodes of the philosophical writings, which strive to overcome such emotions. But the rhetorical methods of self-manipulation are very much the same as those of philosophical self-education.

Further apostrophes to *animus* are found before and in the last scene. In line 976 f., Medea encourages herself to make her crime publicly known: "To work now, my spirit! You must not waste your valor in obscurity" (tr. F) *nunc hoc age, anime: non in occulto tibi est / perdenda virtus*. Involuntarily, Medea reveals here the anti-philosophical aim of her actions: *perdenda virtus*.

The next address to *animus* comes at a moment when Medea's wrath has begun to calm down (*Med.* 988 f.): "Why delay now, my spirit? Why hesitate? Has your powerful anger already flagged?" To light anew the dying flame of hatred, she appeals to a further strong emotion: cruelty. Against the voices of shame and repentance, Medea stubbornly persists in her pursuit, relishing in the terrible pleasure of torturing the unhappy father of her children (*Med.* 991): "A great sense of pleasure steals over me unbidden" (tr. F; *volutas magna me invitam subit*). The numerous apostrophes to *animus* in this tragedy are crowned toward the end by two addresses to *dolor*: "Relish your crime in leisure, my pain, do not hurry" (tr. F; *perfruire lento scelere, ne propera, dolor:*

Med. 1016 f.), a line very close in content to the above description of *voluptas*, and “I had no more to offer you, my pain, in atonement” (tr. F; *plura non habui, dolor, / quae tibi litarem*: 1019 f.). An instructive parallel from the prose writings is Seneca’s apostrophe to Pain (*dolor*): “Slight thou art, if I can bear thee; short thou art, if I cannot bear thee” (*levis es, si ferre possum; brevis es, si ferre non possum*: *epist.* 24.14). In the philosophical writings, passion must be overcome, whereas in the tragedies it is an object of cult (cf. the sacrificial vocabulary in *Med.* 1020).

Similarly, other emotions or virtues may be personified and addressed. In Seneca’s tragedy, Hercules apostrophizes his *virtus* (*Herc. f.* 1315): “Give way, my valor, endure my father’s command” (tr. F; *succumbe virtus, perfer imperium patris*). Here the hero suppresses what in everyday speech is called *virtus* (“manly behavior”) for the sake of *pietas*, which is combined with a nobler type of *virtus* (cf. the chorus’s words: “may the hero’s goodness and heroism return” [tr. F; *redeat pietas / virtusque viro*: *Herc. f.* 1093 f.]).

Tragedies and the “Philosophical Path?”

In Seneca’s, as in the Greek tragedies, the philosophical point of view is often articulated by the chorus or by ordinary people (a nurse, a guardian). In Jason’s case, the philosophical advice he gives to Medea¹¹⁹ is especially tedious, since it is he who caused her hopeless situation. Sometimes Seneca goes further than Greek tragedy, including, for instance, Stoic or Epicurean ideas. All this serves as a foil and brings to the fore the contrary orientation of the protagonists’ minds (Atreus, Medea, Phaedra), their dedication to committing crimes unheard of.

The distortion of the philosophical path into its opposite is ironically spelled out in Medea’s words (*Med.* 1022): “A path has opened to heaven” (tr. F; *patuit in caelum via*). In a literal sense, this is true for Medea: she flees through the air on her magic chariot. A close parallel is Theseus, who says about himself (*Phaedr.* 1213): “Was a path opened to the upper world?” (*patuit ad caelum via?*). The context implies, of course, that his return from the netherworld was useless. When Hercules, in his madness, wants to attack the mansions of the skies (*Herc. f.* 972), this irrational attempt is doomed to failure. Instead, the conqueror of monsters—as a next step—must conquer himself. The questionable “way to heaven” through glory on earth (“and raise him equal with the starry heavens” [tr. F; *caeloque parem / tollat et astris*:

¹¹⁹ *Med.* 537–558; on this, see v. Albrecht 2004: 120–122.

Herc. f. 194f.]) had been belied by the Epicurean wisdom of the chorus in the same play (see *supra*, pp. 727f.). As Seneca puts it in several letters,¹²⁰ the true path to the skies—accessible from the farthest nook, even from prison—is shown by philosophy: the transformation of words and meanings—in order to shape oneself (*te* [...]) *finge: epist.* 31.11)—by means of a rational approach. And there is more: *Ratio* is supported by *pietas*: “and mold thyself to be worthy of godhead” (*dignum* [...] *deo*: Verg. *Aen.* 8.364f., quoted 31.11; cf. *epist.* 86.1 on Scipio’s *pietas*).

In the case of Hercules, the humane aspect of *pietas* appears in his loving obedience to his father, which rightly leads him to reject even what might seem to be heroic *virtus* (*Herc. f.* 1315–1317). Thus he avoids suicide—a great temptation indeed for a Stoic—and chooses the thorny path of humanity and humility. *Pietas*, so grievously hurt by Hercules’s murders, is finally reestablished. This ending is all the more moving because it lacks the usual Stoic bravery and boastfulness. As Seneca, for his caring father’s sake, gave up the idea of killing himself, so does Hercules in his play (*Herc. f.* 1315–1317): “Give way, my valor, endure my father’s command. This labor must be added to the Herculean labors: to live” (tr. F).¹²¹ This passage finds a clear parallel in *epist.* 78.2, in which Seneca speaks of his chronic sickness, the sufferings of which drove him almost to suicide (a step allowed by Stoic philosophy): “I often entertained the impulse of ending my life then and there; but the thought of my kind old father kept me back. For I reflected, not how bravely I had the power to die, but how little power he had to bear bravely the loss of me. And so I commanded myself to live. For sometimes it is even an act of bravery to live.”¹²² The elderly father’s inability to bear his son’s death is graphically expressed in the drama (*Herc. f.* 1308–1313): “I am holding on my very lips this fragile life of mine, wearied with old age and no less wearied with troubles: Can anyone be so slow in granting his father life? (*Taking a sword*) I shall not endure further delay, I shall set my breast against the deadly blade and thrust it in. Here, here shall I lie—the crime of a *sane* Hercules” (tr. F/M). The parallel is instructive not so much for the

¹²⁰ *Epist.* 31.11; 73.11f.; 86.1; 92.30–33.

¹²¹ *Succumbe, virtus* [another address to *virtus*: *Herc. f.* 1156], *perfer imperium patris. / eat ad labores hic quoque Herculeus labor: / vivamus.*

¹²² *Saepe impetum cepi abrumpendae vitae: patris me indulgentissimi senectus retinuit. Cogitavi enim non quam fortiter ego mori possem, sed quam ille fortiter desiderare non posset. Itaque imperavi mihi, ut viverem: aliquando enim et vivere fortiter facere est.* The idea recurs in *Medea* (1018): [Iason] *Infesta, memet perime.* [Medea] *Misereri iubes.* For Jason, life is a more cruel punishment than death. This is an intriguing case of “redefinition”—in a negative vein.

biographical background it reveals as for the fact that we find a similar idea expressed in two different genres. Actually, there is a marked difference in style. In the drama, the father's resolution to kill himself in his turn, should his son die, is amply developed in a speech and underlined by a theatrical gesture, which, in its turn, provokes the son's decision to take upon himself the burden of living, a decision expressed in the drama by an apostrophe to *virtus* (1315). We know that apostrophe is more frequent in Seneca's dramas than in his philosophical writings. This dramatic dialogue is absent from the philosophical text. Instead, the father's and the son's thoughts are condensed into a single antithesis: *Cogitavi enim non quam fortiter ego mori possem, sed quam ille fortiter desiderare non posset*. Seneca the philosopher encapsulates in one sentence the quintessence of his father's and his own reflections. In this case, the avoidance of theatrical apparatus for the sake of a more intellectual approach is quite evident. Therefore, the general description of Seneca's style as "dramatic"—though helpful in many cases—should be modified.

EPILOGUE

*Seneca's Ideas on Language and Style*¹²³

A general problem behind Seneca's use of language and style is addressed in two contrary ways. Traina (1987: 102) maintains that Romans were unsystematic in their approach to life (which is true even of their special field: Roman law), whereas Maurach (1970: 177–179) asserts that Seneca carefully hides his systematic approach behind an unsystematic façade. Each of them, in his way, overstates a true principle. Seneca's use of language and style in the service of his philosophical aims is so deliberate that more general reflections on his part cannot be excluded reasonably, although it would be an exaggeration to term them "systematic," as far as we can judge from the writings that have come down to us. As for ethics, it would be helpful if we had the *Moralis philosophiae libri*. For style, his scattered remarks in the *Letters to Lucilius* are sometimes contradictory, but not irreconcilable (Setaioli 1985).

What Seneca thought about style appears rather clearly from his statements on "imitation" ("intertextuality"). In his view, a writer may be learned

¹²³ For a basic discussion, see Setaioli 1985.

and original at the same time: although bees collect pollen from all kinds of flowers, the honey they produce is all their own (*epist.* 84.3–5, esp. 5). Lucilius wrote about Aetna, as had Virgil, Ovid, and Cornelius Severus;¹²⁴ in Seneca's view, this epigonal situation is an advantage (*epist.* 79.5f.): "And those who have gone before seem to me not to have forestalled all that could be said, but merely to have opened the way [...]. He who writes last has the best of the bargain; he finds already at hand words which, when marshaled in a different way, show a new face. And he is not pilfering them, as if they belonged to someone else, when he uses them, for they are common property." For Seneca, the use of material from earlier writers is no impediment to originality, even in a purely literary sense.

The same is even truer in a moral sense (*epist.* 16.7): "All that has been said well by anyone, is mine." His use of quotations from Epicurus, Virgil, or whomever, is not merely a question of literary imitation or "intertextuality"; striking *sententiae* from poetry or prose are a first-rate instrument of philosophical education. But how does one make a quoted sentence or maxim really "one's own?" One should live it, not just pronounce it (*epist.* 108.38). Style, therefore, is ultimately a problem of character.¹²⁵ Of course, Seneca keeps his distance from slavish imitators (*epist.* 114.18). Contrary to an inveterate prejudice, our author (at least in theory) is an enemy of authors who are fond of mannerisms (*ibid.* 21): "They put up even with censure, provided that they can advertise themselves. That is the style of Maecenas and all the others that stray from the path, not by hazard, but consciously and voluntarily." This is an evil that springs from the mind. Inappropriate style bespeaks a weak *animus* (*ibid.* 22f.). Such a moralistic approach to style is revealed also in his criticism of Ovid (*nat.* 3.27.13–15). Of course, similar objections could be—and have been—raised against Seneca.¹²⁶

On a more general scale, Seneca discusses the problem *talis oratio qualis vita*¹²⁷ in his *epist.* 114 and 115. Behind Seneca's evaluations of the styles of

¹²⁴ *Epist.* 79 mentions many aspects of the theory of *imitatio* prevailing in antiquity; cf. Flashar 1979.

¹²⁵ Scholars are continually surprised that Seneca notes in others the stylistic defects he does not avoid himself. Given human nature, the contrary would be more surprising.

¹²⁶ On Seneca's style: "Luxus verdirbt den Stil, sagt Seneca. / Er mußte es wissen." Seidensticker and Grünbein 2002: 172. Ancient critics: Caligula apud Suet. *Cal.* 53.2 (*arena sine calce*); Quint. *inst.* 10.1.125–131 (cf. Sen. *dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*].13,4 and *epist.* 112.1); Fronto, p. 149.13f.; Van den Hout, Leiden 1954 (*Senecae mollibus et febriculosus prunuleis*); Gell. 12.2.1.

¹²⁷ Möller 2004.

Fabianus¹²⁸ and Maecenas¹²⁹ is the Stoic idea of “following nature.”¹³⁰ Both these examples illustrate contrasting aspects of what could be called “natural style.” Fabianus was “not one of those modern theorizers, but a philosopher of the true and old kind” (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].10.1); his discourse was free of rhetorical adornments. Such a view of “natural”¹³¹ style is in harmony with old Stoicism. A totally different case is Maecenas's style, which (while reflecting his individual nature, i.e., his imperfections and affectations) was monstrous, and therefore ultimately unnatural (*orationis portentosissimae deliciis: epist.* 114.7). However, being natural is not a synonym of artlessness. In the Stoics' view, the individual's nature is perfected by art, thus getting closer to Nature (with a capital letter), that is to say, *ratio*.¹³² There is analogy, therefore, between ethics and literature, and in Seneca's view a careful style is not to be condemned a priori.

Had Seneca possessed only ability and imagination, and not, in addition, a more severe taste than Quintilian was prepared to admit, he would have become neither the “second founder”¹³³ of Latin prose nor the father of the European tradition of the essay.¹³⁴ More significantly, once rediscovered by Justus Lipsius as a Stoic and as a writer, Seneca, the “classic” of non-classical prose, became the patron saint of the liberation of modern languages from “periodic style.”

Seneca's reflections on language and style go beyond older rhetorical traditions; unlike Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Quintilian, Seneca does not recommend the reading of many authors of all kinds.¹³⁵ Some points are strikingly “modern”; most of them are probably in agreement with

¹²⁸ Chrysippus (while stressing the importance of rhetorical performance / *actio*) was indifferent to stylistic niceties, admitting hiatus and even solecism (*apud* Plut., *De Stoic. repugn.* 28. 1047 A–B = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2.297–298).

¹²⁹ *Epist.* 101.10–15 criticizes lines of Maecenas only for their content (adherence to life, fear of death).

¹³⁰ Setaioli 1985: 812f. (on a Stoic doctrine expounded and criticized by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De compositione verborum* 4f.).

¹³¹ Fabianus's words were not *huius saeculi more contra naturam suam posita et inversa* (*epist.* 100.5).

¹³² The human soul is part of the cosmic fire or of the cosmic *pneuma* (*sacer intra nos spiritus: epist.* 41.2) which possesses *logos* and is therefore able to strive “homeward” (*dial.* 11 [= *cons. Helv.*].11.6–8; *epist.* 65.16; 79.12), but it needs to be admonished.

¹³³ Guillemin 1957.

¹³⁴ Cancik 1967: 91–101.

¹³⁵ *Epist.* 2; v. Albrecht 2004: 24–30; *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).9.4–7 (books as ornaments of walls); *epist.* 27.5 (learned slaves—a substitute for education?); 88 (*de liberalibus studiis*); 106.11f. (*litterarum* [...] *intemperantia laboramus*): Mazzoli 1970: 11–14.

Panaetius:¹³⁶ no insistence on unattainable ideals, a high evaluation of individual features even against an established model, the avoidance of blind imitation, and care for developing one's own nature. It should be kept in mind, however, that for Seneca "nature" is not irrational, but rational. The fact that in Seneca *imitatio* amounts to an organic cultural education recalls Panaetius's idea of *sapere* as the source of good oratory and poetry.¹³⁷ The same is true of the value placed on the relationship between literature and ethics.

¹³⁶ Setaioli 1985: 856.

¹³⁷ Cic. *orat.* 70; Hor. *ars* 309; G.T.A. Krüger in his edition of Horace's *Satires and Epistles* (Leipzig, ⁸1876: ad loc., p. 330 f.) comments: "richtige Einsicht in allen nur denkbaren Beziehungen; also nicht der von den Genieaffen für das Höchste gehaltene *furor poeticus*" ("the right insight into all conceivable relationships, that is, not the *furor poeticus* which is most important for those affected admirers of genius") (cf. Hor. *ars* 295–301).

SYSTEMATIC CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SENECA'S PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS AND TRAGEDIES

Susanna E. Fischer

Duosque Senecas unicumque Lucanum / facunda loquitur Corduba—“Silver-tongued Corduba speaks of the two Senecas and the one Lucan.”¹ This poem by Martial, which refers to Seneca rhetor and his son, Seneca philosophus and tragicus, could have led to the confusion that lasted for several hundred years. In the fifth century, it was presumably the reason that Sidonius Apollinaris mentioned two Senecas, a philosopher and a tragic poet: “[...] of whom one is devoted to the unkempt Plato and vainly admonishes his pupil Nero, another rouses again the stage of Euripides.”² In the fourteenth century, Giovanni Boccaccio, after discovering the poems of Martial, calls the tragedian Marcus—“and this ghost survived on the title-page of the tragedies and in literary histories until well into the eighteenth century” (Mayer 1994: 152). Others, like Erasmus (*Epistolae* 8.37 f.) or Justus Lipsius (*Animadversiones in tragoedias quae L. Annaeo Senecae tribuuntur*), believed that the corpus of the tragedies had more than one author. In the late sixteenth century the Jesuit Martin Delrio affirmed in his *Syntagma tragoediae latinae* that all Senecan plays (except for *Octavia*) are the work of a single writer: Lucius Annaeus Seneca.³ As Mayer has noted, “Delrio’s contention evoked a fresh debate in which the philosophical viewpoint of the tragedian took its place as a factor in deciding authenticity.”⁴ Delrio was also the first proponent of a Stoic interpretation of Seneca’s plays, as Mayer stresses (1994: 152). Still, there were those who did not believe that Seneca philosophus was the author of the tragedies because of their content. A Stoic philosopher could not have written tragedies in which characters like Atreus or Medea triumph. This was a widespread opinion for a

¹ Martial 1.61.7 f. Cf. Mayer 1994 and Trillitzsch 1971 for a full discussion on the testimonies on Seneca and the Senecae.

² Trans. Anderson. [...] *quorum unus colit hispidum Platona / incassumque suum monet Neronem, / orchestram quatit alter Euripidis* [...] (*carm.* 9.230–234). Discussed by Mayer 1994: 152. On Sidonius, see Trillitzsch 1971: 189 f.

³ Discussed by Mayer 1994: 153.

⁴ Ibid.

long time. Today, we know that Seneca philosophus and Seneca tragicus are indeed the same person, but the relation of the philosophical works to the tragedies continues to be an important issue in research on Seneca. Many scholars agree that the diverse genres provide some explanations for the differences between tragedy and philosophy. Nonetheless, finding arguments for and against Stoic elements in the tragedies remains a central area of research.

Although a discussion of the *interpretatio Stoica* is beyond the scope of this article, addressing the connections between Seneca's philosophical works and his tragedies involves a large variety of often contrary views that range from a pedagogical understanding of the tragedies in close connection with the philosophical writings to a purely poetic interpretation. Admittedly, some connections are undeniable, for example, that Seneca's psychology of passions or his concept of kingship is reflected in his tragedies, but it is the controversial issues that prevail. And even in the former cases, there are differing views about the details of the relation.

The choral odes provide a telling example of the vivid discussion in this area. *Phaedra* provides one illustration: On the one hand, the chorus is viewed as a Stoic chorus expressing an objective view of the events (cf. Lefèvre 1969 [1972]: 374 f.). On the other hand, it is seen interpreting the events from a mythical point of view familiar to the audience (Schmidt 1995: 288).⁵

This example vividly demonstrates the difficulty of the issue. Some readers establish a close connection between the choral odes and the philosophical writings, while others vigorously deny it. The aim of this article is to relate Seneca's philosophical writings to his tragedies without suggesting a Stoic interpretation of the plays. In so doing, it will examine a selection of relevant passages in order to demonstrate the connections between Seneca's philosophical works and his tragedies. Just as crucial as the actual connections between the two genres are those passages in which a resemblance would be expected, but is, in fact, absent.

The paper is divided into four parts, each of which is devoted to a different field of connection: Poetry, politics, psychology, and physics. The first section focuses on three aspects of Seneca's attitude toward poetry: Seneca's criticism of poets, his use of mythological allegoresis, and his use of *sententiae*. The purpose of the second section is to highlight the area of politics, focusing on

⁵ Furthermore, there is an intense debate on the relation of the choral odes and the tragic plot, arguing whether the odes are to be interpreted as a mere interlude or as an essential part of the plot. See Kugelmeier 1999: 139–144 on *Phaedra* and the discussion on the choral odes.

Seneca's ideal of kingship. The third section will address the psychology of passion, especially of anger, while the fourth section is concerned with Stoic physics: god, gods, providence, and fate.

SENECA AND POETRY

Frequent citations of poets in most Stoic writings indicate the great interest Stoic philosophers took in poetry (cf. De Lacy 1948: 241). Chrysippus is said to have cited nearly the full text of Euripides's tragedy *Medea*. Diogenes Laertius (7.180) reports that a reader responded when asked what he was reading: Chrysippus's *Medea*. The anecdote illustrates Chrysippus's way of handling tragic poetry by frequently citing it. By contrast, Seneca rarely cites tragedians, neither Greek nor Roman, in his philosophical works.⁶ While other Stoics merely quote tragedians, Seneca is a tragedian himself. He cites other poets, mainly Ovid (*Metamorphoses*) and Virgil (*Aeneis*),⁷ using them primarily to underline his philosophical teachings.

In his philosophical writings, Seneca not only quotes poets but also criticizes the mythological contents of poems by accusing the poets of supporting the impulsive action of men. Moreover, the gods of the poets are objectionable role models because of their immoral character, as Seneca points out in *De brevitae vitae*; they give mankind a justification for immoral deeds.

It is this also that accounts for the madness of poets in fostering human frailties by the tales in which they represent that Jupiter under the enticement of the pleasures of a lover doubled the length of the night. For what is it but to inflame our vices to inscribe the name of the gods as their sponsors, and to present the excused indulgence of divinity as an example to our own weakness?⁸

Seneca condemns the indecent and morally objectionable nature of myth, as when, for example, he addresses the tales of Jupiter's love affairs in *De vita beata*:

⁶ For instance *epist.* 115.14 (Euripides). Discussed by Dingel 1974: 48 f. and Mazzoli 1970: 171 f. and 188 f.

⁷ For a survey of all citations of poets, cf. Mazzoli 1970: 295 f. See also Dingel 1974: 48 f. and Maguinness 1956.

⁸ Trans. Basore 1932. *Inde etiam poetarum furor fabulis humanos errores alentium, quibus visus est Iuppiter voluptate concubitus delenitus duplicasse noctem: quid aliud est vitia nostra incendere quam auctores illis inscribere deos et dare morbo exemplo divinitatis excusatam licentiam?* (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*] 16.5, cf. *epist.* 115.12).

I can endure your delusions just as Jupiter, the highest and best, endures the inanities of the poets. One of these has given him wings, another horns, another has portrayed him as an adulterer staying out all night, another as cruel towards the gods, another as unjust towards men, another as a ravisher of freeborn boys (even his kinsmen), another as a parricide and usurper of another's kingdom—his father's. The only thing they have achieved by this is to acquit men of shame for their sins, if they believe the gods are like that.⁹

Seneca's tragedies, on the other hand, do not express criticism of poets.¹⁰ On the contrary, we find a god remarkably similar to that Seneca criticizes in the work of other poets. A striking example is given in Juno's prologue in *Hercules furens*, the only appearance of a god in Seneca's tragedies. Here, Seneca ascribes attributes to Juno that are similar to those he criticizes in *De vita beata*. Juno's character is dominated by *saevitas* and *iniquitas*, two qualities entirely inappropriate for a goddess. She complains of her rivals who populate heaven as stars (*Herc. f.* 1ff.). The motif of the prolonged night, in which Jupiter procreated Hercules, is criticized in the philosophical writings, but nevertheless used in the tragedy's prologue (21f.). In short, as Dingel puts it (1974: 66): "Der Dichter Seneca ignoriert die Kritik des Philosophen Seneca." ("The poet Seneca ignores the criticism by Seneca the philosopher.")

Usually, Stoics try to explain myths by means of allegoresis.¹¹ In the *Allegoriae Homericae* by Heraclitus, this is illustrated by an example that refers to Stoic doctrine (33): As one of his heroic labors Hercules, the prototype and ideal of the wise man in the Stoic tradition, kidnaps the beast Cerberus from Hades. For Heracleitos, Cerberus with his three heads represents philosophy with its three branches, which are brought to light.

Generally, there are two types of allegoresis, the physical-cosmological and the psychological-ethical (Steinmetz 1986: 18f.). Zeno, for example, makes use of the former in order to explain by means of etymological deductions the mythological figures that Hesiod and Homer describe in

⁹ Trans. Costa 1994. *Sic vestras hallucinationes fero quemadmodum Iuppiter optimus maximus ineptias poetarum, quorum alius illi alas inposuit, alius cornua, alius adulterum illum induxit et abnoctantem, alius saevum in deos, alius iniquum in homines, alius raptorem ingenuorum et cognatorum quidem, alius parricidam et regni alieni paternique expugnatorem: quibus nihil aliud actum est quam ut pudor hominibus peccandi demeretur, si tales deos credidissent* (*dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*], 26.6, cf. *Cic. nat. deor.* 2.70).

¹⁰ But cf. in opposition, Eur. *Herc.* 1341–1346, in which Hercules criticizes the poets' portrayal of the gods.

¹¹ See for Stoic allegoresis, see Fischer 2008: 74f., Wiener 2006: 193–200, Wildberger 2006: 31f., see. n. 159 for further reading, Gourinat 2005a, Goulet 2005, Boys-Stones 2003: 189–216, Long 1996b: 56–84, Brisson 1996, Most 1989, Steinmetz 1986.

accordance with Stoic ideals. With respect to mythological allegoresis, Cleanthes and Chrysippus follow the tradition of Zeno (Cic.*nat. deor.* 1.36 f. and 2.167 f.). Seneca himself does not discuss allegoresis in full detail, but refers to it in passing in two passages of *De beneficiis* and of the *Epistulae morales*. In *De beneficiis* 1.3.2 f., Seneca disapproves of Chrysippus's allegorical explanations of the Graces: "Chrysippus, too [...] devotes his entire book to such frivolities—to the extent of saying very little about the duty itself of doing, accepting or returning a favour. Nor does he graft these stories onto his argument, but the other way round."¹² The second passage in which Seneca mentions allegoresis, *epist.* 88,¹³ elucidates that his criticism is aimed not at allegoresis itself but at the sophisticated execution of the method. Analogously to his critique of Chrysippus in *De beneficiis*, Seneca complains that matters of no importance are emphasized while essential philosophical issues remain untouched. An illustrative example is why Helena seems younger than Hecuba although she is in fact older (*epist.* 88.6). Seneca uses ethical allegoresis in his *Naturales quaestiones*, when he interprets the three kinds of lightning allegorically as a model for punishments by rulers (*nat.* 2.41–45).¹⁴

In the tragedies, however, Juno's speech in *Hercules furens* has given rise to different allegorical interpretations, either as *ira*¹⁵ or as *fortuna*.¹⁶

Another example of an allegorical interpretation is the bull in *Phaedra*, which kills Hippolytus. The bull symbolizes the power of *ira*, which, in the opinion of several scholars, is actually responsible for Hippolytus's death.¹⁷ There is a striking resemblance to the description of *ira* in the second book of *De ira* (*dial.* 4.35.4 f.). To highlight the similarities, we will take a look at two examples: In *De ira*, the personified anger is described with conflagrant eyes (*flamma lumina ardentia*: *dial.* 4.35.5). In *Phaedra* 1040 f., we find the same motif in the seaborne bull's eyes: *flammam vomunt / oculi*. Anger is pictured in *De ira* as wild and destructive, just like the tidal wave in *Phaedra* (*terras maria caelum ruere cupientem*: *dial.* 4.35.5).

¹² Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Chrysippus quoque [...] totum librum suum his ineptiis replet, ita ut de ipso beneficio et commercio dandi, accipiendi, reddendi beneficii pauca admodum dicat; nec his fabulas, sed haec fabulis inserit* (*benef.* 1.3.8).

¹³ Cf. Wiener 2006: 197 f., Stückelberger 1965. For a different approach, see Dingel 1974: 44. Dingel states that Seneca is alienated ("distanziert") by allegoresis.

¹⁴ Cf. Wiener 2006: 196 and Armisen-Marchetti 2000: 204 f.

¹⁵ See Wellmann-Bretzigheimer 1978.

¹⁶ See Novara 1987 and 1988, Fischer 2008: 84 f.

¹⁷ Discussed by Fischer 2008: 100 f., Schmidt 1995: 311, Fuhrmann 1968: 45.

Nevertheless, the field of allegoresis and, in particular, Seneca's use of it in his tragedies still leaves room for dispute. Allegorical interpretations are only one means of interpreting the tragedies.

We now turn to a formal characteristic of Seneca's writing in both prose and verse: the *sententiae*.¹⁸ Seneca is famous for his concise phrasing and accordingly indicates a preference for *sententiae* written in verse. Therefore, his style is often referred to as "rhetorical" or "declamatory."¹⁹

In *De brevitae vitae* he compares the words of poets to oracles: "[...] that I cannot doubt the truth of that utterance which the greatest of poets delivered with all the seeming of an oracle: 'The part of life we are really living is small.'"²⁰ Like an oracle, a *sententia* conveys truth in an abbreviated form (Dingel 1974: 29).

Seneca makes use of *sententiae* that are already part of an existing textual corpus by reusing them in his philosophical writings whenever he regards them as useful for his purposes (*epist.* 108.10, Dingel 1974: 30 f.). An illuminating example of Seneca's understanding of *sententiae* is given in *epist.* 94.27 f. *Praecepta* are plausible without explanations, if they are written in verse: "Moreover, the precepts which are given are of great weight in themselves, whether they be woven into the fabric of song, or condensed into prose proverbs."²¹ As one specific instance of this assumption, Seneca cites Virgil's famous phrase *audentis Fortuna iuvat* (*Aen.* 10.284). Because of their conciseness, *sententiae* are particularly memorable and produce a powerful psychagogical effect (cf. Seidensticker 1969: 198), which is supported by their metrical form. Since this characteristic of *sententiae* is independent of their content, Seneca, too, is critically aware of the fact that they can also transport immoral content. Therefore, the seeming advantage can have an undesirable result, which is demonstrated by Atreus's notorious words in Accius's tragedy *oderint, dum metuant* (*TRF*³ 5.203 f. R). Caligula, whom Seneca often takes as a negative example,²² is said to have used these words frequently, as we know from Suetonius (*Cal.* 30.1). Seneca cites this *sententia* three times in

¹⁸ For *sententiae* in Seneca's philosophical writings, see Seidensticker 1969: 197 f., in the tragedies cf. Seidensticker 1969: 180 f. and Dingel 1974: 28 f.

¹⁹ See on this topic, for example, Boyle 1997: 18 f.

²⁰ Trans. Basore 1932. [...] *ut quod apud maximum poetarum more oraculi dictum est verum esse non dubitem: 'exigua pars est vitae qua vivimus'* (*dial.* 10 [= *brev.*].2.2, a quotation of an unknown poet, cf. Dingel 1974: 25).

²¹ Trans. Gummere 1925. *Praeterea ipsa quae praecipuntur per se multum habent ponderis, utique si aut carmini intexta sunt aut prosa oratione in sententiam coartata* (*epist.* 94.27).

²² For example, in *benef.* 4.31 f.

his writings: once in *De ira* (*dial.* 3 [= *de ira* 1].20.4) and twice in *De clementia*, where the verse is called *execrabilis* (*clem.* 1.12.4) and *detestabilis* (*clem.* 2.2.2).²³ The awareness of the potential danger of *sententiae* did not prevent Seneca from making frequent use of them in all his writings. As Dingel notes, “He often reflected upon this form of expression and his reflexions deserve the more attention insofar as he often makes use of aphorisms in his tragedies.”²⁴ Seneca surpasses the Greek tragedians by far in his use of *sententiae* in his tragedies.²⁵ Seidensticker (1969: 196) emphasizes that the central ideas of the tragedies have a greater impact when formulated in general, rather than specific terms. Thus, the poet is able to draw the audience’s attention to the transpersonal importance of the respective scene (1969: 195).

The idea that *sententiae* are capable not only of emphasizing the central ideas of particular scenes but also of entire tragedies—as Seidensticker (1969: 195) claims—is problematic especially if one considers the large scale of the different interpretations of each drama. But it is indisputable that, selectively, *sententiae* are very effective. A vivid example is provided in the final line of the first choral ode in *Hercules furens*: “Spirited valor falls from great height.”²⁶ *Sententiae* like this are found frequently at the end of choral odes and monologues.²⁷ The text refers to Hercules and his descent into Hades. The chorus, therefore, reminds us of the dark side of heroic glory. To consider this *sententia* as a key sentence for the understanding of the whole tragedy²⁸ is to overemphasize a single verse. In tragedies with a number of different characters, *sententiae* are not as easily intelligible as they are in philosophical writings representing a superordinate authority.

²³ Discussed by Dingel 1974: 37 and Braund 2009 *ad clem.* 1.12.4.

²⁴ “Über diese Ausdrucksform hat er öfters reflektiert und seinen Reflexionen kommt umso größere Bedeutung zu, als er in seinen Tragödien von Sentenzen weiten Gebrauch macht.” (Dingel 1974: 28).

²⁵ For an exhaustive treatment of *sententiae* in Greek tragedy compared to Senecan tragedy, see Seidensticker 1969: 180 f.

²⁶ Translations of the tragedies in this article are by Fitch 2002 and 2004. *Alte virtus animosa cadit* (*Herc. f.* 201). For a more detailed interpretation of this verse, see Billerbeck 1999 *ad loc.*

²⁷ For example, *Herc. f.* 874, *Tro.* 162 f., 291, 425, *Med.* 109. See Billerbeck 1999 on *Herc. f.* 201.

²⁸ Cf. Zintzen 1972: 164 and Seidensticker 1969: 113 f. and more generally 195. Cf. Billerbeck 1999 on *Herc. f.* 201.

POLITICS: SENECA'S IDEAL OF GOOD KINGSHIP

Seneca was not only a philosopher and tragedian but also a politician.²⁹ In his prose writings, discussions about political commitment or the ideal ruler are widespread. *De clementia*, "Seneca's principal contribution to political philosophy" (Davis 2003: 69), was written in AD 55/56.³⁰ Here, Seneca addresses the young Emperor Nero and explains his model of good kingship. In many ways, *De ira* is a complementary work to *De clementia*.³¹ Developing the dangers of anger, Seneca gives various negative examples of unsound and corrupt rulers.

Royal dynasties constitute the world of tragedy, with rulers such as Theseus in *Phaedra*, Creon in *Medea*, or Lycus in *Hercules furens*. It is not surprising that the ideas of Seneca philosophus on kingship recur frequently in his tragedies.³² The portrayal of *rex* and *tyrannus* in *De clementia* is alluded to in the words of the rulers in the tragedies. A valid example is found in the drama *Thyestes*, which was probably written later than *De clementia*,³³ in the character of Atreus in particular.³⁴ In the second act, Atreus begins with a monologue, referring to himself as *tyrannus* (*Thy.* 177). Angrily, he considers the best way for taking revenge on his brother. In the following stichomythic exchange with his *satelles* (204–218),³⁵ he turns out to be the counterpart to Seneca's concept of a good ruler. The *satelles* expresses not only "common decency,"³⁶ his words also show close connections to passages of *De clementia*.

He interrupts Atreus's thoughts of revenge by asking: "You have no fear of hostile talk among the people?"³⁷ In *De clementia*, Seneca counsels Nero: "But

²⁹ Cf. De Vivo and Lo Cascio 2003, Griffin 1976. On a political interpretation of the tragedies, see Liebermann 2004: 14 f. and Davis 2003, Grewe 2001, Mader 1998, and Lefèvre 1990, 1985a, and 1985b.

³⁰ On *De clementia*, see Braund 2009.

³¹ Braund 2009: 70 f. For a full discussion, see Mazzoli 2003.

³² The second area of political interpretation of Senecan tragedy is beyond the scope of this paper. Some scholars go further, trying to highlight contemporary references, partially even to concrete personages. Lefèvre, for example, interprets Phaedra as Agrippina (Lefèvre 1990). These attempts are controversial due to the doubtful date of the tragedies. Cf. the criticism of Liebermann 2004: 19 f.

³³ For a discussion of the date of *Thyestes*, see Nisbet 2008 (1990) and Fitch 2004a: 10 f.

³⁴ On the connection of *Thyestes* and *De clementia*, cf. Braund 2009: 73 f., Schiesaro 2003: 159 f., Mader 1998, Davis 2003: 69 f., and Lefèvre 1985b: 1266.

³⁵ Cf. debates with the same subject in other tragedies: e.g., *Oed.* 699 f., *Tro.* 332 f., *Med.* 195 f. Cf. Tarrant 1985: 204–219.

³⁶ Davis 2003: 72 and Lefèvre 1985b: 1266.

³⁷ *Fama te populi nihil / adversa terret?* (204 f.). Cf. Mader 1998: 35.

princes should give much weight even to rumor.”³⁸ In the following passages, Seneca becomes even more explicit: “Cruel masters have the whole city pointing at them with hatred and loathing. So, too, with kings. The wrongs that they commit have a wider scope. The infamy and odium is passed on over the centuries. How much better never to have been born than to be classed as one whose birth was a public misfortune.”³⁹ But with his reference to public opinion, the *satelles* does not get Atreus to change his mind. Instead, we learn that Atreus’s perception of the *maximum bonum* of kingship includes the idea that the people are obliged to praise and endure the deeds of the ruler at the same time (205 f.). Against Atreus’s concept, the *satelles* puts forth his role model of a ruler who lives in harmony with his people: “Let a king want what is honorable: everyone will want the same.”⁴⁰ The *satelles*’s statement is closely connected to Seneca’s idea of the ideal ruler. In *De clementia*, Seneca uses the organic metaphor (cf. Braund 2009: 57 f. and 69) of soul and body to describe the relationship between the king and his people (*clem.* 1.3.5–1.5.1). But Atreus exemplifies Seneca’s concept of *tyrannus* by replying to the *satelles*: “Righteousness, goodness, loyalty are private values: kings should go where they please.”⁴¹

The two speakers argue for diametrically opposing models of kingship—the *satelles* for a system of benevolent monarchy, Atreus for the despot’s complete freedom from political and moral constraints. What we have, in effect, is a dramatized and much condensed version of a political polarity which is treated more fully in *De clementia*—there too the benign monarch is defined in symmetrical opposition to his tyrannical counterpart.⁴²

Analogously to the characters of Atreus and the *satelles* in *Thyestes*, opposing pairs of characters appear frequently in the tragedies in order to discuss values of kingship in a wider sense. Consider, for example, Lycus and Hercules in *Hercules furens*, Pyrrhus and Agamemnon in *Troas*⁴³, and Eteocles and Polynices in the incomplete *Phoenissae*.⁴⁴

To sum up, many parallels can be drawn on the idea of kingship between Seneca’s tragedies in general and *De clementia* in particular.

³⁸ *Principes multa debent etiam famae dare* (1.15.5).

³⁹ *Quemadmodum domini crudeles tota civitate commonstrantur invisique et detestabiles sunt, ita regum et iniuria latius patet et infamia atque odium saeculis traditur; quanto autem non nasci melius fuit quam numerari inter publico malo natos!* (1.18.3).

⁴⁰ *Rex velit honesta: nemo non eadem volet* (213).

⁴¹ *Sanctitas pietas fides / privata bona sunt; qua iuvat reges eant* (217 f.).

⁴² Mader 1998: 34, cf. Davis 2003: 72.

⁴³ For the title “Troas” instead of “Troades” see *supra* Strohm, p. 435.

⁴⁴ Discussed by Braund 2009: 74 f.

PSYCHOLOGY: PASSIONS AND FIGHTING AGAINST PASSIONS

The psychology of passions provides close connections between the philosophical writings and the tragedies.⁴⁵ Passions and their control are central topics in Stoic ethics. "Passions are objectionable impulses of the spirit, sudden and vehement; they have come so often, and so little attention has been paid to them, that they have caused a state of disease."⁴⁶ According to Seneca's concept, passion is always a voluntary act, *voluntarium animi vitium* (*dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].2.2),⁴⁷ that is approved by a *iudicium*.

In the tragedies, passions like *timor*, *amor*, and *ira* are crucial, as is exemplified by Oedipus's fear of his fate, Phaedra's love, and Medea's anger.

In *Medea*, the chorus tells us that "Medea cannot rein in her feelings of love or anger."⁴⁸ In many tragedies, anger is the dominating emotion. The treatment of *ira* in the tragedies is closely connected with Seneca's *De ira* and his theory of aggression ("Aggressionstheorie," Bäumer 1982). The depiction of the characters in the heat of the moment closely corresponds to the picture of the *iratus* displayed in the first book of *De ira* (*dial.* 3.1.3 f.), where anger is described as "brief insanity":

You can see that men possessed by anger are insane, if you look at their expression. The sure signs of raving madness are a bold and threatening look, a gloomy countenance, a grim visage, a rapid pace, restless hands, change of colour, heavy and frequent sighing. The marks of anger are the same: eyes ablaze and glittering, a deep flush over all the face as blood boils up from the vitals, quivering lips, teeth pressed together, bristling hair standing on end, breath drawn in and hissing, the crackle of writhing limbs, groans and bellowing, speech broken off with the words barely uttered, hands struck together too often, feet stamping the ground, the whole body in violent motion "menacing mighty wrath in mien," the hideous horrifying face of swollen self-degradation—you would hardly know whether to call the vice hateful or ugly.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ For a full discussion, see Bäumer 1982: 72 f. and 137 f.

⁴⁶ Trans. Gummere. *Adfectus sunt motus animi inprobabiles, subiti et concitati, qui frequentes neglectique fecere morbum* (*epist.* 75.12).

⁴⁷ In this context, the accentuation of will is a Senecan idea. In essence, according to Bäumer (1982: 95), *ira* and its consequences are submitted to the accountability of man for his own actions. For the concept of will in Seneca, see Inwood 2008 and Zöller 2003.

⁴⁸ *Frenare nescit iras / Medea, non amores* (866 f.).

⁴⁹ Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Ut scias autem non esse sanos quos ira possedit, ipsum illorum habitum intueri; nam ut furentium certa indicia sunt audax et minax vultus, tristis frons, torva facies, citatus gradus, inquietae manus, color versus, crebra et vehementius acta suspiria, ita irascentium eadem signa sunt: flagrant ac micant oculi, multus ore toto rubor exaestuante ab imis praecordiis sanguine, labra quatiuntur, dentes comprimuntur, horrent ac surriguntur capilli, spiritus coactus ac stridens, articularum se ipsos torquentium sonus, gemitus mugitusque*

In *Med.* 382–390, the nurse describes the physical symptoms of Medea's anger:

Like an ecstatic maenad taking erratic steps, crazed and possessed by the god, on snowy Pindus's peak or Nysa's ridges, so she keeps running here and there with wild movements, with signs of frenzied rage in her expression. Her face is blazing, she draws deep breaths, she shouts out, weeps floods of tears, beams with joy; she shows evidence of each and every emotion. She hesitates, threatens, fumes, laments, groans.⁵⁰

In *Phaedra*, the symptoms of Phaedra's love sickness are presented in a remarkably similar way (360–383). But the connection to the philosophical writings goes further and does not end with the external signs of a passion. Moreover, the tragedies also visualize how the passion of anger is developed and how the confidants act and react to their protégés' passions.

In the entire corpus of the tragedies, only the character of Medea, as Bäumer stresses, shows the development of the passion of *ira* to its full extent: "In all the other characters who are marked by *ira*, this development is complete already in the beginning of the play."⁵¹ In his second book of *De ira* (*dial.* 4.4), Seneca explains how the passion develops its full power in three stages.⁵²

If you want to know how the emotions begin, grow or get carried away, the first movement is involuntary, a preparation, as it were, for emotion, a kind of threat. The next is voluntary but not insistent—I may, for example, think it right for me to wreak vengeance because I have been harmed or for him to be punished because he has committed a crime. The third really is out of control; wanting retribution not just "if it is right" but at all costs, it has completely overcome the reason. The first is a mental jolt which we cannot escape through reason, just as we cannot escape those physical reactions which I mentioned—the urge to yawn when someone else yawns, or blinking when

et parum explanatis vocibus sermo praeruptus et conplosae saepius manus et pulsata humus pedibus et totum concitum corpus magnasque irae minas agens, foeda visu et horrenda facies depravantium se atque intumescantium—nescias utrum magis detestabile vitium sit an deforme. Cf. *De ira* 2 (*dial.* 4.35.3–36.2) and 3 (*dial.* 5.4.1 f.).

⁵⁰ *Incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit / cum iam recepto maenas insanit deo / Pindi nivalis vertice aut Nysae iugis, / talis recursat huc et huc motu effero, / furoris ore signa lymphati gerens. / flammata facies, spiritum ex alto citat, / proclamat, oculos uberi fletu rigat, / renidet: omnis specimen affectus capit. / haeret: minatur aestuat queritur gemit.* Cf. Hine 2000: 380–396: "But the portrait of Medea here has an additional element, her indecisiveness."—a general characteristic of Medea in literature. For the connection to *De ira*, see Bäumer 1982: 148 f.

⁵¹ "Bei allen anderen durch *ira* gekennzeichneten Personen ist diese Entwicklung bereits zu Beginn des Dramas abgeschlossen." (Bäumer 1982: 165).

⁵² Discussed by Wiener 2006: 27 f., Bäumer 1982: 95 f.

fingers are flicked at the eye. These cannot be overcome by reason, though habituation and constant attention may perhaps lessen them. The other sort of movement, generated by decision, can be eliminated by decision.⁵³

Not until the third stage does the passion erupt irreversibly. In the first two stages, the affected person still has the possibility of suppressing the passion. In the second stage, *ratio* is able to prevent the final outbreak of the passion. In her interpretation, Bäumer divides *Medea* into a “three-stage model”: Stage 1 is apparent in the prologue, 1–55; the critical stage 2 is presented in 116–578; and, finally, the third stage is pictured in 670–1027 (154 f.). The development of *Medea*’s *ira* mostly follows this model. There are only minor differences; for example, the restraining of urges (“Triebhemmung”) by a different passion, as Bäumer (1982: 139) notes: the passion does not develop continuously but is restrained constantly by the opposing passion of love.

It is possible to connect Seneca’s theory of aggression not only with *Medea*, as demonstrated here, but with all his tragedies. Examples are Atreus in *Thyestes*; Hercules and Juno in *Hercules furens*; Achilles and Agamemnon in *Troas*; Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*; Hippolytus, Phaedra, and Theseus in *Phaedra*; Oedipus in *Oedipus*; and Oedipus, Eteocles, and Polynices in *Phoenissae*, as Birt has already catalogued them (although his general interpretation is questionable).⁵⁴

In the third book of *De ira*, Seneca gives concrete instructions for a therapeutic regimen to treat the passions (*dial.* 5.1 and 5.39 f.). The recommended course of action is summarized by Wiener (2006: 35). One efficient strategy is to win the patient’s trust by seemingly responding to his or her thirst for revenge and thereby gaining time in order to calm the patient down. A second method is to control the acute passion by arousing an opposing passion (e.g., *metus*). Wiener (2006: 35 f.) demonstrates that the advisers in the tragedies sometimes make use of this “first-aid program.”⁵⁵ We can turn

⁵³ Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Et ut scias quemadmodum incipiant adfectus aut crescant aut efferantur, est primus motus non voluntarius, quasi praeparatio adfectus et quaedam comminatio; alter cum voluntate non contumaci, tamquam oporteat me vindicari cum laesus sim, aut oporteat hunc poenas dare cum scelus fecerit; tertius motus est iam inpotens, qui non si oportet ulcisci vult sed utique, qui rationem evicit. primum illum animi ictum effugere ratione non possumus, sicut ne illa quidem quae diximus accidere corporibus, ne nos oscitatio aliena sollicitet, ne oculi ad intimationem subitam digitorum comprimantur: ista non potest ratio vincere, consuetudo fortasse et adsidua observatio extenuat. alter ille motus, qui iudicio nascitur, iudicio tollitur.*

⁵⁴ Birt 1911a: 348 f. Cf. Bäumer 1982: 161 f.

⁵⁵ For a critical view on Wiener’s interpretation of therapeutic dialogues, see Wildberger’s review (2008).

to *Medea* for two specific illustrations. First, the nurse responds positively to the details of Medea's plan of revenge (150 f.) in order to gain time.⁵⁶ Second, she tries to produce another emotion in Medea, namely fear, by describing Creon's intimidating powers to her (164 f.). But Medea no longer listens to arguments. In her desire for revenge, she is even willing to destroy herself, if only the others perish with her (426 f.). This desire for self-destruction is also expressed by Clytemnestra (*Ag.* 201) and Atreus (*Thy.* 190 f.): "This mighty house of famous Pelops itself—let it fall even on me, so long as it falls on my brother."⁵⁷ Although such vengeful characters already exist in Greek tragedies,⁵⁸ it is striking that their depiction parallels the description of anger at the beginning of the first book of *De ira*:⁵⁹ "careless of itself so long as it harms the other, it rushes onto the very spear-points, greedy for vengeance that draws down the avenger with it."⁶⁰

It is possible to intensify the passion of *ira*. This is what happens to Medea and Atreus. *Crudelitas*⁶¹ originates in *ira*⁶² and is a chronic (*vitia [...] inveterata et dura: epist.* 85.10) and irreversible (*in statum inemendabilem adducta: epist.* 106.6) attitude, like, for example, *avaritia* and *superbia*. Seneca specifies *crudelitas* as being the opposite of *clementia*: "Cruelty, which is nothing other than grimness of mind in exacting punishment."⁶³ According to Seneca, a person is cruel if he or she has in fact reason for punishment, but is excessive in its execution (*qui puniendi causam habent, modum non habent: clem.* 2.4.3; cf. *epist.* 95.30). Cruelty causes humans to cast off their humanity and become beasts: "Cruelty is utterly inhuman, an evil unworthy of a mind so mild as man's. It is bestial madness to rejoice in wounds and blood, to cast off the man and turn into an animal of the forest."⁶⁴

Nobody is inhuman enough to be evil just for pleasure: "No one has rebelled against nature's law and shed his humanity to the extent of being

⁵⁶ For a different view on these verses, see Heldmann 1974: 123 f.

⁵⁷ *Haec ipsa pollens incliti Pelopis domus / ruat vel in me, dummodo in fratrem ruat.*

⁵⁸ Cf., for example, the chorus in Soph. *El.* 1078 f. See Tarrant 1985 on *Thy.* 190 f.

⁵⁹ See the commentaries ad loc.: Costa on *Medea*, Tarrant on *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes*.

⁶⁰ Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Dum alteri noceat sui neglegens, in ipsa inruens tela et ultionis secum ultorem tracturae avidus* (*dial.* 3 [= *de ira* 1].1.1, cf. *dial.* 3.5.2).

⁶¹ Cf. Fischer 2008: 29 f. and 153 and, for a full discussion, Bäumer 1982: 122 f.

⁶² Cf. *dial.* 4 (= *de ira* 2).5.1 f.

⁶³ Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Crudelitas quae nihil aliud est quam atrocitas animi in exigendis poenis* (*clem.* 2.4.1, cf. 3: *inclinatio animi ad asperiora*).

⁶⁴ Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Crudelitas minime humanum malum est indignumque tam miti animo; ferina ista rabies est sanguine gaudere ac vulneribus et abiecto homine in silvestre animal transire* (*clem.* 1.25.1).

bad purely for the pleasure of being so.”⁶⁵ This psychological observation, however, applies only to common people, not to cases of chronic evil, as described by Seneca in *De clementia* and *De ira*, and especially not to his tragic characters Atreus and Medea. In his philosophical writings, Seneca is convinced that changing from evil to good is always possible in general. In *De clementia* 1.13.2, tyrants and people imprisoned by their cruelty, mutilated in their ability to change their characters any longer, are exceptions.⁶⁶ A further intensification of *crudelitas* is *feritas*, raging without cause, driven only by pure pleasure:⁶⁷ “We might say that it is not ‘cruelty’ but a ‘bestiality’ that takes pleasure in being savage.”⁶⁸ Seneca illustrates this climax of *ira* to incredible human rancor in *De ira* with the example of Phalaris, who is said to have roasted human beings alive inside a brazen bull (*dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].5.1f.; cf. *clem.* 2.4.3). In this respect, Seneca’s philosophical writings frequently make reference to historic personages such as Alexander (*clem.* 1.25.1) or Caligula (e.g., *dial.* 5 [= *de ira* 3].18.3).

In the tragedies, Atreus and Medea take pleasure in killing, especially in killing the innocent. After having killed her first child, Medea expresses her delight: “A great sense of pleasure steals over me unbidden.”⁶⁹ Similarly, the messenger describes Atreus’s joy, stylizing the murders as sacrifices: “and (Atreus) takes pleasure in ordering the savage crime.”⁷⁰

The depiction of the characters in the tragedies in a state of emotion reveals strong similarities to Seneca’s theory of the passions in his philosophical writings, in particular to *De ira*.

PHYSICS: GOD, GODS, PROVIDENCE, FORTUNE, AND FATE

Next, we will explore the connections between the philosophical writings and the tragedies in the field of physics. Accordingly, we will investigate

⁶⁵ Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Nec quisquam tantum a naturae lege descivit et hominem exiit, ut animi causa malus sit* (benef. 4.17.3).

⁶⁶ *Hoc enim inter cetera vel pessimum habet crudelitas: perseverandum est nec ad meliora patet regressus; scelera enim sceleribus tuenda sunt. quid autem eo infelicius, cui iam esse malo necesse est?* Cf. Zöller 2003: 185.

⁶⁷ For the pleasure gained from evil, cf. Thome 1993: 85–89 and Motto 1970: 57 f. on cruelty.

⁶⁸ Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Possumus dicere non esse hanc crudelitatem, sed feritatem cui voluptati saevitia est* (*clem.* 2.4.2).

⁶⁹ *Voluptas magna me invitam subit* (991, cf. 911 f. where the subject is the killing of Absyrtus).

⁷⁰ *Saevum scelus / iuvat ordinare* (715 f., cf. 253). For murders as sacrifices, see Fischer 2008: 124 f.

Seneca's conception of god, in particular his idea of providence, fortune, and fate in the philosophical works as well as their depiction in the tragedies.

In comparison with his literary predecessors, Seneca eliminates the appearance of gods in his tragedies to a large extent. An illustration of this elimination can be found in *Phaedra*. In Euripides's *Hippolytos*, Aphrodite appears in the prologue and Artemis at the end of the tragedy, but neither appears on stage in Seneca's play. A probable explanation for this could be Seneca's refusal to present a goddess taking revenge on a human being. But as in Euripides, a seaborne bull sent at Theseus's pleading kills Hippolytus. Seneca retains the role of Poseidon/Neptune, fulfilling the curse as a necessary part of the plot, but without the appearances of the goddesses, which is less apparent than in Euripides's version.

In his philosophical writings, Seneca's conception of god is in line with orthodox Stoic doctrine, according to which there is only one god, who is referred to by different names depending on his different functions (e.g., *SVF* 2.1070). God can also be referred to as *rector*, *animus ac spiritus mundi*, *natura*, *mundus*, *providentia*, *fatum* (cf. *Sen. nat.* 2.45). In the hymn to Zeus (*SVF* 1.537), Cleanthes calls god *polyonymos*.⁷¹ All of these names refer to the same god but highlight different aspects of his nature and his distinct responsibilities.⁷² In Seneca's words: "You cannot have nature without god, nor god without nature. Each is the same as the other, differing only in function. [...] In the same way, you can call on Nature, Fate, or Fortune. All are names of one and the same god variously exercising his power."⁷³

The established polytheism is successfully integrated into the pantheistic system of the Stoics⁷⁴ because the Olympic gods are also seen as a part of god and the Stoic texts are adapted to the general language usage.⁷⁵ Seneca's tragedies correspond with traditional religious belief, since the choral odes

⁷¹ For the hymn by Cleanthes, cf. Asmis 2007, Thom 2005, Cassidy 1997, and Steinmetz 1994: 578.

⁷² Cf. *quaecumque voles, illi nomina proprie aptabis vim aliquam effectumque caelestium rerum continentia: tot appellationes eius possunt esse quot munera* (*Sen. benef.* 4.7.2).

⁷³ Trans. Cooper and Procopé 1995. *Nec natura sine deo est nec deus sine natura, sed idem et utrumque, distat officio. [...] sic nunc naturam voca, fatum, fortunam: omnia eiusdem dei nomina sunt varie utentis sua potestate* (*Sen. benef.* 4.8.2 f., cf. *SVF* 1.102).

⁷⁴ *SVF* 1.168 and 169.2, 1021.2, 1076, *Sen. benef.* 4.8.1.

⁷⁵ Cf. *SVF* 1.164: *Antisthenes [...] unum esse naturalem deum dixit, quamvis gentes est urbes suos habeant populares. eadem fere Zeno cum suis Stoicis*. How traditional religion is dealt with has generated a controversial discussion. Cf. Wildberger 2006: 24 f. and Attridge 1978: 66. For the Stoics' interpretation of Jupiter in Nero's time, see Ramelli 1997. For further reading, see Wildberger 2006: n. 159.

deal with the myths of the gods⁷⁶ and the characters pray to the gods⁷⁷ and call them as witnesses.⁷⁸

Seneca's philosophical concept of god is characterized by a strongly emphasized divine benevolence, an aspect of divine nature the Stoics call providence (*providentia*). Divine goodness is a crucial part of Seneca's conception of the gods: "containing in their nature the essence of goodness."⁷⁹ Because of their nature, gods cannot do harm or suffer harm themselves: "And what reason have the gods for doing deeds of kindness? It is their nature. One who thinks they are unwilling to do harm, is wrong: they cannot do harm."⁸⁰ Gods also lack certain human characteristics. Gods cannot be angry,⁸¹ because, by their nature, they are kind and gentle (*mitis, placida: dial. 4 [= de ira 2].27.1*). Gods are neither haughty nor envious (*non sunt dii fastidiosi, non invidi: epist. 73.15 f.*), but calm and easily forgiving (*placabiles et aequi: clem. 3.5.2*).

The belief in providence results inevitably in one of the largest problems of Stoic philosophy. Emphasizing the perfection of the world and the kindness of the gods poses the question how these aspects can be compatible with the existence of evil in the world. Ever since Leibniz, in the seventeenth century, this problem has been called "theodicy." Seneca develops a solution to this problem in his only extant work on a theological issue, *De providentia*, which addresses the question of the presumed injustice of god, who seems to torment good people instead of rewarding them. This question is part of a complex problem that Stoics had to encounter in conjunction with divine providence. The following words of Ennius's Telamo (*Telamo* frg. 134 Jocelyn 1967), which are cited in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, serve as an illustration: "Telamo dispatches the whole topic of proving that the gods pay no heed to man in a single verse: 'For if they cared for men, good men would prosper and bad men come to grief; but this is not so.'"⁸²

⁷⁶ Cf. e.g., Bacchus: *Oed.* 405–466 or the love affairs of Jupiter: *Phaedr.* 299 f.

⁷⁷ See *Ag.* 802–807, *Thy.* 1006 f., 1068 f., *Phaedr.* 54–80, 406–425, 670–684. For prayer in *Phaedra* particularly, see Secci 2000.

⁷⁸ *Tro.* 644, *Med.* 439 f., *Thy.* 1069, *Phaedr.* 604, 663, 888.

⁷⁹ Trans. Gummere 1925. *Pars naturae eorum est bonos esse* (Sen. *epist.* 95.36).

⁸⁰ Trans. Gummere 1925. *Quae causa est dis bene faciendi? natura. errat si quis illos putat nocere nolle: non possunt* (*epist.* 95.49. Cf. *benef.* 7.31.4 and *dial.* 4 [= *de ira* 2].27.1).

⁸¹ *SVF* 2.1120, Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.91, *off.* 3.102.

⁸² Trans. Rackham 1972. *Telamo autem uno versu totum locum conficit cur di homines neglegant: "nam si curent, bene bonis sit, male malis; quod nunc abest."* (Cic. *nat. deor.* 3.79). Cf. e.g., Plat. *rep.* 364b, Acc. *TRF*³ 142 f. R. For further testimonies, see Jocelyn 1967 ad loc. and Pease 1958 ad loc.

In *De providentia*, Seneca tries to align evil in the world with divine providence by interpreting evil as a mere challenge, the only thing to demonstrate to a man his own virtue: *marcet sine adversario virtus* (*dial.* 1.2.3); *calamitas virtutis occasio est* (*dial.* 1.4.6); *avida est periculi virtus* (*dial.* 1.4.4). The positive effect of evil in the world is that man is able to prove his worth in the fight with *fortuna*. A *vita honesta* cannot be lived without trouble (*epist.* 67.7) because without being tested, without the existence of evil, virtue might remain obscure.⁸³ For Seneca philosophus, the challenging counterpart of virtue is personified *fortuna*. *Fortuna* is entirely appropriate for this task because, if personified, she is an actual opponent embodying negative qualities and injustice. Among her characteristics, we find malice, fickleness, unreliability, and recklessness against merit and virtue: *quam raro fortuna iudicat*.⁸⁴ Men seem to be subject to the power of fortune.⁸⁵ In *epist.* 74.7–9, Seneca depicts fortune as playing games with men: *ludos facere fortunam*.⁸⁶

Although *fortuna* is often a major issue, Seneca uses the concept of *fortuna* as a challenge frequently in his philosophical writings but only rarely in his tragedies. For an illuminating example of the philosophical use of *fortuna*, consider *Oedipus*. As Oedipus contemplates leaving everything behind at the beginning of the play, Iocasta stops him by appealing to his royal honor: “How does it help, my husband, to make troubles heavier by bemoaning them? The quality of a king lies, I think, in the very ability to take on adversities. The more unsure his situation, the more balance of supreme power tilts toward falling, so much more firmly should he stand, resolute and unbudging. It is not manly to retreat before fortune.”⁸⁷ Clearly, this passage adopts the tone of Seneca philosophus. A *vir fortis* does not capitulate in the face of *adversa* but is eager to prove himself instead.⁸⁸

The idea of battle between man and fortune provides an explanation for the only appearance of a goddess on stage, namely Juno in *Hercules*

⁸³ Cf. *virtus non contingit animo nisi instituto et edocto et ad summum adsidua exercitatione perducto* (Sen. *epist.* 90.46, cf. 80.3). Cf. *epist.* 66.36., *dial.* 2 (= *const.*).9.3., Epikt. *diatr.* 1.24.1., Ov. *trist.* 4.3.80.

⁸⁴ *Benef.* 2.28.2. Cf. *dial.* 11 (= *cons. Pol.*).3.4.

⁸⁵ *Fortunae regnum: dial.* 7 (= *vit. beat.*).25.5., 10 (= *brev.*).10.4.; *imperium: dial.* 8 (= *de otio*).8.3.

⁸⁶ Cf. *dial.* 9 (= *tranq.*).11.5., 1 (= *prov.*).3.3 and *epist.* 118.3. Discussed by Kajanto 1972: 188.

⁸⁷ *Quid iuvat, coniunx, mala / gravare questu? regium hoc ipsum reor: / adversa capere, quoque sit dubius magis / status et cadentis imperi moles labet, / hoc stare certo pressius fortem gradu: / haud est virile terga fortunae dare* (*Oed.* 81–86). Cf. Creon in *Oed.* 681 and Antigona in *Phoen.* 77 f., 188 f. Cf. also Amphitryon talking to Hercules in *Herc. f.* 1239.

⁸⁸ How this attitude toward *adversa* fits into the question of Oedipus is a point we can only raise here in passing. See, for example, von Fritz 1962b: 29 f.

furens. In Euripides's *Herakles*, Amphitryon—a man—speaks the opening monologue. In this respect, Seneca considerably diverges from his main example. His Juno in *Hercules furens* is radically different from his own idea of god in the philosophical writings. She thwarts Hercules and wants to harm him as much as possible. Her envy of the hero's greatness, her jealousy of her rivals, especially Alcmena, as well as her anger motivate the story of the tragedy. Scholars have presented several solutions for this problem: It is possible to explain Seneca's portrayal of Juno in accordance with her description in the literary tradition (Billerbeck 1999: 33 f.) or to interpret her as an allegorical figure of fortune (Novara 1987 and 1988, Fischer 2008: 84 f.) because her attitude toward Hercules correlates with Seneca's philosophical conception of fortune as a challenge for men.

In Seneca's tragedies, global considerations of the motif of fortune are found more frequently than the philosophical idea of fortune as a challenge. The downfall of the great and their change of fortune are suitable tragic themes of which Seneca makes extensive use in particular in the choral odes of *Hercules furens* (odes 1 and 2), *Phaedra* (odes 2, 3, and 4), *Agamemnon* (ode 1), and *Thyestes* (odes 2 and 3). In addition to the choral odes, examples of the use of the motif in the plays are the monologue at the beginning of *Oedipus* (1 ff.) and the quarrel of Agamemnon and Pyrrhus over the sacrifice of Polyxena in *Troas* (203 f.). For a vivid example of Seneca's use of the motif of fortune, consider *Agamemnon*. The first ode is about *regnum* and *fortuna*: "O Fortune, beguiler by means of the great blessings of thrones, you set the exalted in a sheer, unstable place."⁸⁹ This connection is frequently made in the tragedies, predominantly in the choral odes.⁹⁰ In *De tranquillitate animi*, Seneca also stresses the fragility of fortune for men in high positions: "What kingship does not face ruin and trampling down, the tyrant and the hangman? And these things are not separated by wide intervals: there is only a brief hour between sitting on a throne and kneeling to another."⁹¹ Man must be aware of the changeability of every situation. At every moment, the greatest happiness can reverse completely and change back again. To the reader of *De tranquillitate animi*, Seneca recommends the words of Publilius

⁸⁹ *O regnorum magnis fallax fortuna bonis, / in praecipiti dubioque locas excelsa nimis* (57 f.).

⁹⁰ There are also passages in which the queens and kings who suffer from misfortune bemoan their downfall, like Hecuba in *Tro.* 1–6 or Thyestes in *Thy.* 446–470.

⁹¹ Trans. Costa 1994. *Quod regnum est cui non parata sit ruina et proculcatio et dominus et carnifex? nec magnis ista intervallis divisa, sed horae momentum interest inter solium et aliena genua* (*dial.* 9 [= *tranq.*] 11.9).

Syrus: "What can happen to one can happen to all."⁹² Those who keep this condition in mind are able to ensure victory over fortune.

In *Phaedra*, the chorus asks Jupiter, in the third ode, "But why are you [...] so remote and lacking in care for humans, so unconcerned to support the good, to scourge the wicked?"⁹³ The downfall of an innocent at the hands of a god, as befalls Hippolytus in *Phaedra*, is contradictory to the concept of divine goodness in Seneca's philosophical works.⁹⁴ Accordingly, the chorus asks the same question Seneca tries to answer in his dialogue *De providentia*: "You have asked me, Lucilius, why, if a providence rules the world, it still happens that many evils befall good men."⁹⁵ Because the dramatic plot apparently does not solve this problem, the chorus in *Phaedra* draws the conclusion that *fortuna* reigns the human world: "Human affairs with no semblance of order are ruled by Fortune. She scatters her gifts blindly,⁹⁶ promoting all that is worst."⁹⁷ Providence, reigning over the cosmos, is opposed to *fortuna*, blindly ruling the human world. This concept of *fortuna* ruling human affairs only seems to be opposed to the Stoic idea of the world when the regular movement of the stars and the usual change of seasons highlight that the world is ruled by laws.⁹⁸ The chorus uses a concept of *fortuna* that resembles the common belief in Tyche/*fortuna*.⁹⁹ Seneca pictures *fortuna* similarly in his philosophical writings.¹⁰⁰ The chorus raises a problem, which they cannot solve, but philosophy can.

⁹² Trans. Costa 1994. *Cuivis potest accidere quod cuiquam potest* (*dial.* 6 [= *cons. Marc.*] 9.5).

⁹³ *Sed cur [...] hominum nimium securus abes, / non sollicitus prodesse bonis, / nocuisse malis?* (972 f.).

⁹⁴ Because of this contradiction, the question of Hippolytus's innocence has been a topic of discussion. See Lefèvre 1969.

⁹⁵ Trans. Basore 1928. *Quaesisti a me, Lucili, quid ita, si providentia mundus ageretur, multa bonis viris mala acciderent* (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*] 1.1).

⁹⁶ *Fortuna* is called *caeca* (980) as usual in literature, but in Seneca's writings this is the only testimony for this epithet (but cf. *fors caeca* in Sen. *Phoen.* 632). For the proverbial blindness of fortune, see, for example, Cic. *Phil.* 13.5.10, *Auct. ad Herenn.* (Pacuvius) 22.3.36., Plin. *nat.* 2.22.

⁹⁷ *Res humanas ordine nullo / fortuna regit sparsitque manu / munera caeca peiora fovens* (978–980).

⁹⁸ Cf. Schmitz 1993: 158. *Oct.* 377–380 is influenced by this opposition of chaos in the human world and the orderly divine providence. Cf. also Lucan. 7.445–455.

⁹⁹ The idea of a fickle Tyche is developed in Hellenism. Plinius presents the Roman idea of the omnipotent fortune in the following passage: *toto quippe mundo et omnibus locis omnibusque horis omnium vocibus fortuna sola invocatur ac nominatur, una accusatur, rea una agitur, una cogitatur, sola laudatur, sola arguitur et cum conviciis colitur, volubilisque, a plerisque vero et caeca existimata, vaga, inconstans, incerta, varia indignorumque faultrix* (Plin. *nat.* 2.22).

¹⁰⁰ On *fortuna* in Seneca, see Fischer 2008: 36 f., Wildberger 2006: 47 f., Hachmann 2000, and Busch 1961.

We now turn to a different aspect of the deity: *fatum*.¹⁰¹ To a large extent, Seneca adheres to orthodox Stoic doctrine in this field. The predetermined course of events, *fatum*, is one aspect of the divine nature. Three closely connected aspects are crucial for the description of fate.¹⁰² (1) Fate provides order and structure in the world. In Stoic explanations, fate is often associated with the idea of connection or concatenation of things and events.¹⁰³ Bearing this in mind, Seneca writes *seriem [...] causarum ex quibus nequitur fatum* (*epist.* 19.6). (2) Fate causes events to unfold according to a cosmic plan, which is why the *series inplexa causarum* (Sen. *benef.* 4.7.2) is the eternal and irrevocable arrangement of events. Neither human nor diviner *ratio* can change the principle of causation (*SVF* 2.923–924) that was ordained by god (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].5.8). (3) Characteristics of fate are inevitability, immutability, and necessity: *continuus ordo fatorum et inevitabilis cursus* (*epist.* 88.15, cf. 16.5, 96.1f., 101.7).

Since Seneca's major concern in his philosophical writings is ethics, in regard to *fatum*, he also concentrates on fate's relationship to ethics. The behavior of men toward fate is a central issue for Seneca: Men are not meant to rebel against fate, but to follow it willingly. In *De vita beata*, Seneca presents this idea as follows: "obedience to god is freedom" (*deo parere libertas est: dial.* 7 [= *vit. beat.*].15.7). Even if fate is unchangeable, philosophy is not in vain but supports us and teaches us to follow god.¹⁰⁴ The wise man is able to follow fate confidently because he knows that god's will can only be benevolent: following god does not mean obeying god (*parere deo*), but agreeing with god (*adsentiri: epist.* 96.2). Considering these words, it becomes evident that in Seneca's conception of *libertas* it is not freedom in the sense of free will that is the main concern.¹⁰⁵

The connection between freedom and death¹⁰⁶ is crucial to Seneca's thought. Suicide, a frequent issue in his philosophical writings, is described as the road to freedom: "On all sides lie many short and simple paths to freedom;

¹⁰¹ On Stoic *fatum*, cf. Bobzien 1998a and, for example, Fischer 2008: 179 f., Wildberger 2006: 42 f., Jedan 2004, Frede 2003, Algra et al. 1999, Steinmetz 1994, Pötscher 1978.

¹⁰² See Bobzien 1998a: 48 f. for a full discussion.

¹⁰³ Cf. *SVF* 2.917, 2.921. For further similar passages, see Pease 1963 *ad* Cic. *div.* 1.125. See also Wildberger 2006: n. 261.

¹⁰⁴ *Haec [scil. philosophia] adhortabitur ut deo libenter pareamus, ut fortunae contumaciter; haec docebit ut deum sequaris, feras casum* (*epist.* 16.5).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Inwood 2005a: 306, Griffin 1976: 383 f.

¹⁰⁶ For the notion of death in Stoic thought, see Inwood 2005a: 302 f., Leeman 1971, Rist 1969: 233–255, and Scarpato 1965: 259–281.

and let us thank God that no man can be kept in life."¹⁰⁷ In addition, there are passages in Seneca's writings in which he even glorifies suicide. In letter 70, for example, Seneca states that the opportunity to commit suicide is the best thing that *lex aeterna* created (*epist.* 70.14). Likewise, the suicide of Cato the Younger always presents an opportunity for praise.¹⁰⁸ In *De constantia sapientis* 2.2 Seneca states: "For Cato did not survive freedom nor freedom survive Cato."¹⁰⁹

Seneca describes what freedom means to him in *epist.* 51.9: "And what is freedom, you ask? It means not being a slave to any circumstances, to any constraint, to any chance; it means compelling Fortune to enter the lists on equal terms. And on the day when I know that I have the upper hand, her power will be naught. When I have death in my control, shall I take orders from her?"¹¹⁰ An important aspect for Seneca is "the possibility of being an agent," as Inwood (2005a: 306) stresses. This aspect is also reflected in the tragedies. Seneca devotes the fifth act of *Troas* to a depiction of the heroic deaths of Polyxena and Astyanax. Despite being forced into death, Polyxena and Astyanax die freely and voluntarily in the end. The Trojans' freedom can only mean the freedom of the defeated to die. Polyxena (*Tro.* 1143 f.) and Astyanax (*Tro.* 1088 f.) escape the constraint by sacrificing themselves, as Seneca expresses in his translation of Cleanthes's prayer (*SVF* 1.527): "the willing soul fate leads, but the unwilling drags along."¹¹¹ Polyxena and Astyanax behave the way Seneca postulates for the wise man: They commit suicide and thus surrender voluntarily to their enforced fate, which is why Polyxena is called *audax virago* (1151) as she faces death: "all were moved by the braveness of her spirit, facing death head-on."¹¹² The example of Polyxena is intensified by Astyanax, whose role is unique in comparison with Seneca's

¹⁰⁷ Trans. Gummere 1917. *Patent undique ad libertatem viae multae, breves, faciles. agamus deo gratias quod nemo in vita teneri potest* (*epist.* 12.10). Cf. 26.10, 60.9, 70.12 and 14–16, 77.14 f. For more examples, see Motto 1970: 87, Sevenster 1961: 52–57, and Warnach et al. 1972: 1070 f. However, there are cases in which it is more honorable not to choose suicide as an escape. Seneca writes in *epist.* 78.2 that he himself did not commit suicide out of respect for his father. Cf. *epist.* 48.15 f., 104.3 f. and, in the tragedies, *Herc. f.* 1240 f.

¹⁰⁸ *Epist.* 13.4, 24.6–8, 67.7 and 13, 70.19 and 22, 71.16 f., 82.12 f., 95.72, 104.29 and 32. For more examples, see Motto 1970: 207.

¹⁰⁹ Trans. Costa 1994. *Neque enim Cato post libertatem vixit nec libertas post Catonem.*

¹¹⁰ Trans. Gummere 1917. *Quae sit libertas quaeris? nulli rei servire, nulli necessitati, nullis casibus, fortunam in aequum deducere. quo die illam intellexero plus posse, nil poterit: ego illam feram, cum in manu mors sit?*

¹¹¹ Trans. Gummere 1925. *Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt* (*epist.* 107.11).

¹¹² *Movet animus omnes fortis et leto obviis* (1146).

literary predecessors. By acting like this, Polyxena and Astyanax assert their freedom in a Senecan way.

We gain a different perspective on fate in *Oedipus*. The fact that the idea of fate is present in this tragedy establishes a connection to Seneca philosophus. Oedipus himself mentions fate, *fatum*, most frequently. In conjunction with the plague, he feels himself a victim of *fatum* already in the prologue: "At this very moment fate is preparing some device against me."¹¹³ His words are filled with dark premonitions and are characterized by *timor*¹¹⁴ of the predicted fate. Therefore, *fatum* is an evil power for Oedipus. Oedipus's view of fate is noted by Davis (1991: 151): "But there is another use which has no parallel in Stoic philosophy and that is Fate as a malevolent force which seeks to destroy individuals. That is how Oedipus conceives of Fate." At the end of his monologue, Oedipus prays for death, calling to the gods and fate. He considers these powers as hostile forces: "The gods are too cruel, fate too harsh."¹¹⁵ The chorus also reflects on fate.¹¹⁶ The last ode is most conspicuous, since it presents fate in an orthodox Stoic view and is, in this respect, an exception in Seneca's tragedies. The fifth choral ode (980–994) deals with the immutability of fate: "We are driven by fate, and must yield to fate. No anxious fretting can alter the threads from that commanding spindle."¹¹⁷ In *Oedipus*, we find the Stoic concept of fate only in this choral ode. "Everything travels on a path cut for it, and the first day decides the last. Not even a god can change events which run in a woven series of causes."¹¹⁸ The same idea appears in Seneca's philosophical writings: "An unchangeable course bears along the affairs of men and gods alike. Although the great creator and ruler of the universe himself wrote the decrees of Fate, yet he follows them. He obeys for ever, he decreed but once."¹¹⁹

The chorus in *Oedipus* continues to reflect on fate: "Each person's commanding thread of life continues unchanged by any prayer."¹²⁰ This motif is also found in poetry, for example, in Virgil: "Cease to dream that heaven's

¹¹³ *Iam iam aliquid in nos fata moliri parant* (28).

¹¹⁴ On the fear of fate as the most important passion of the play, see von Fritz 1962b: 27 f.

¹¹⁵ *O saeva nimium numina, o fatum grave* (75). Cf. *Phaedr.* 1271 and *Tro.* 1056.

¹¹⁶ On the choral odes of *Oedipus*, see Caviglia 1996 and Davis 1993.

¹¹⁷ *Fatis agimur: cedite fatis; / non sollicitae possunt curae / mutare rati stamina fusi* (980–982). Cf. Töchterle 1994: 608.

¹¹⁸ *Omnia secto tramite vadunt / primusque dies dedit extremum: / non illa deo vertisse licet, / quae nexa suis currunt causis* (987–990).

¹¹⁹ Trans. Basore 1928. *Inrevocabilis humana pariter ac divina cursus vehit: ille ipse omnium conditor et rector scripsit quidem fata, sed sequitur; semper paret, semel iussit* (*dial.* 1 [= *prov.*].5.8).

¹²⁰ *It cuique ratus prece non ulla / mobilis ordo* (991).

decrees may be turned aside by prayer.”¹²¹ In his philosophical writings, Seneca cites this verse in connection with the immutability of fate in *epist.* 77.12. But in *nat.* 2.35–38, Seneca states that prayers (*vota*) are nonetheless reasonable.¹²²

The ending of the ode has provoked many debates and often been seen as key to a Stoic interpretation of the play: “Many are hurt by fear itself, many have come upon their fate through fear of fate.”¹²³ Schetter (1972: 404 f.) interprets these words as the lesson to be learned from *Oedipus*. Von Fritz (1962) shows that the tragedy focuses on the passion of *timor*, but that the way Oedipus handles his *timor* does not change his fate.¹²⁴

Basically, the myth of Oedipus contains problems that prove difficult for a Stoic interpretation from the start. Dingel (1974: 72) puts these problems into the following words:

In his *Oedipus* Seneca wrote the tragedy of a man who was destined to commit crimes and who had been told that this was his fate. This causes a conflict a Stoic could not solve: For if he deliberately did what was prophesied because he believed in the inevitability of fate, he would violate moral rules. On the other hand, if he rebelled against his fate for the sake of moral rules, he would break the law according to which he had to accept the *fatum*.¹²⁵

The consequences of these words are crucial for Dingel’s understanding of the whole corpus of Seneca’s tragedies, as he emphasizes a strong antagonism between Senecan philosophy and tragedy and interprets the plays as “poetisch formulierten, negativen Stoizismus” (“negative Stoicism in a poetic form”) and calls them the dark side and finally even the negation of Seneca’s philosophy (Dingel 1974: 116). However, the implicit theory that Seneca states his true opinion in his tragedies and not in his philosophical writings has been rejected by many scholars.¹²⁶ But Dingel’s thesis highlights, in a provocative way, general conflicts between Seneca philosophus and tragicus that are crucial for any study of this topic.

¹²¹ Trans. Fairclough 1956. *Desine fata deum flecti sperare precando* (*Aen.* 6.376).

¹²² Cf. Fischer 2008: 189 f., Wildberger 2006: 331 f.

¹²³ *Multis ipsum metuisse nocet, / multi ad fatum venere suum / dum fata timent* (992–994).

¹²⁴ Discussed by Dingel 1974: 77, Seidensticker 1969: 40.

¹²⁵ “Seneca hat in seinem Oedipus die Tragödie eines Mannes geschrieben, dem das Schicksal bestimmt hat, Verbrechen zu begehen, und dem dieses Schicksal vorher prophezeit worden ist. Damit ist ein Konflikt gegeben, den ein Stoiker prinzipiell nicht lösen könnte. Denn wenn er, im Glauben an die Unausweichlichkeit des Schicksals, das Vorausgesagte willentlich täte, würde er gegen die Moral verstoßen. Andererseits, wenn er sich um der Moral willen gegen das Schicksal auflehnte, würde er das Gebot der Hingabe an das *Fatum* verletzen.”

¹²⁶ Dingel 1974: 118. Cf. the reviews by Lefèvre 1977 and Abel 1976. Cf. also Wiener 2006 and Biondi 2001.

It is noticeable how negatively the gods are depicted in the tragedies. Seneca's characters refer to the gods as *saevi*,¹²⁷ *leves*,¹²⁸ *immites* (*Tro.* 644), *dubii* (*Ag.* 930). They have, however, good reason to question the favor of the gods because their expectation that good gods prevent crime is disappointed. Villains do not experience an unhappy ending. By contrast, innocents suffer or, more often, die cruelly. A vivid example is found at the ending of *Medea*. Taking flight in the chariot drawn by serpents, Medea says: "A path has opened to heaven: twin serpents offer their scaly necks bowed to the chariot yoke. Now recover your sons as their parent. I shall ride through the air in my winged chariot."¹²⁹ In the impressive finale of the play, Jason calls to her: "Travel on high through the lofty space of heaven, and bear witness where you ride that there are no gods."¹³⁰

A further interpretation of *Oedipus* and *Medea* is beyond the scope of this paper. Problems such as those discussed *supra* are starting points for a vivid discussion on the interpretation of Seneca's tragedies. The reader must decide whether the moral principles of the plays remain ambiguous or not and whether the connections between Seneca's philosophical writings and tragedies result more from the philosophical interest of the author than from the intentional communication of Stoic thought. To a large extent, scholars agree that Seneca's tragedies can be reduced to neither their philosophical nor their poetic aspects, but the connections between Seneca philosophus and Seneca tragicus, particularly in respect of an *interpretatio Stoica*, are far from being thoroughly examined.

¹²⁷ *Tro.* 1101. Cf. *Oed.* 74. The *fata* are often called *saeva*, too (e.g., *Ag.* 230, *Phaedr.* 1271).

¹²⁸ *Tro.* 2, *Ag.* 606.

¹²⁹ *Patuit in caelum via: / squamosa gemini colla serpentes iugo / summissa praebent. recipe iam gnatos, parens; / ego inter auras aliti curru vehar* (1022–1025).

¹³⁰ *Per alta vade spatia sublime aetheris, / testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos* (1026f.).

LIST OF JOURNAL ABBREVIATIONS

A&A	<i>Antike und Abendland</i>
AC	<i>L'Antiquité Classique</i>
ACD	<i>Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debrecensis</i>
ÆAnt	<i>Aevum Antiquum</i>
AHB	<i>Ancient History Bulletin</i>
AIV	<i>Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, Classe di Scienze Morali e Lettere</i>
AJPh	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AMArc	<i>Atti e Memorie dell'Arcadia</i>
AncPhil	<i>Ancient Philosophy</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i>
ARF	<i>Appunti Romani di Filologia</i>
AU	<i>Der Altsprachliche Unterricht</i>
BAGB	<i>Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé</i>
BMCR	<i>Bryn Mawr Classical Review</i>
BollClass	<i>Bollettino del Comitato per la Preparazione dell'Edizione Nazionale dei Classici Greci e Latini</i>
BollStudLat	<i>Bollettino di Studi Latini</i>
C&M	<i>Classica et Mediaevalia</i>
CA	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
CB	<i>Classical Bulletin</i>
CFC	<i>Cuadernos de Filologia Clasica</i>
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
CML	<i>Classical and Modern Literature</i>
CPh	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
EClás	<i>Estudios Clásicos</i>
FI	<i>Florentia Iliberritana</i>
G&R	<i>Greece & Rome</i>
GB	<i>Grazer Beiträge</i>
GIF	<i>Giornale Italiano di Filologia</i>
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
ICS	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
IJCT	<i>International Journal of Classical Tradition</i>
IMU	<i>Italia Medievale e Umanistica</i>
JbAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JHI	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
JHPH	<i>Journal of the History of Philosophy</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
LCM	<i>Liverpool Classical Monthly</i>
MD	<i>Materiali e Discussioni per l'Analisi dei Testi Classici</i>

MH	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
NAWG	<i>Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen— Philologisch-Historische Klasse</i>
NJA	<i>Neue Jahrbücher für das Klassische Altertum, Geschichte, Deutsche Literatur und Pädagogik</i>
OSAPh	<i>Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy</i>
QCTC	<i>Quaderni di Cultura e di Tradizione Classica</i>
QUCC	<i>Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica</i>
RCCM	<i>Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale</i>
REA	<i>Revue des Études Anciennes</i>
REL	<i>Revue des Études Latines</i>
RFIC	<i>Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica</i>
RhM	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>
RHT	<i>Revue d'Histoire des Textes</i>
RIL	<i>Rendiconti del Reale Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere; poi Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere. Accademia di Scienze e Lettere, Classe di Lettere e Scienze Morali e Storiche</i>
RPh	<i>Revue de Philologie</i>
RSC	<i>Rivista di Studi Classici</i>
SIFC	<i>Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica</i>
SO	<i>Symbolae Osloenses</i>
TAPhA	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Associa- tion</i>
YCS	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>
WS	<i>Wiener Studien</i>

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